Anglican Churches Engaging with People Living with Disabilities

By Monica Short

With an essay by Dr Louise Gosbell

bca bush church aid Going the distance

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Charles Sturt University

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highly gifted Bruce Nicholson for turning my notes into this book.

To those who make my heart beat—Mark Short, Andrew Short and Matthew Short—thank you for your wonderful support and cheering on both me and this project.

I thank God for you all.

Foreword

CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia partnered with Monica Short and Charles Sturt University in this publication and its underlying research because we believe it explores a key and sometimes overlooked aspect of church health. Healthy churches are places of gospel-based inclusion, where the good news of Jesus inspires welcome, engagement and connection in people from all backgrounds. In the stories that follow, you will read how local congregations and the communities they serve have been enriched by the presence and ministry of people living with a disability.

Rob Nicholls, *Church Engagement Lead for CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program writes:* In churches large and small, rural and urban, people who have been welcomed in Christ are, in turn, welcoming others. In celebrating these positive stories, we acknowledge that there are many individuals and families who are still missing out on fellowship and

the church is also missing out on their presence and contribution. We hope that this research and the positivity of these stories encourage those individuals and families to believe that things are changing and encourage the church to continue to work towards being fully inclusive of people with a disability. Monica Short provided very helpful research into the mutual benefits of inclusion—when done well—for people living with a disability and the church. Inclusion only occurs when people with disabilities are able to make a contribution and know they truly belong to a community. We thank Monica for the thoroughness of her research and her faithfulness to the people who beneficially contributed their time and stories. We also thank Louise Gosbell for her contribution in providing a perspective from city churches and the people she interviewed.

The Right Reverend Stuart Robinson*, Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn writes:* Storytelling is a powerful medium. In this well-researched and colourfully written volume, we are privileged to hear of the journey and experiences of sisters and

brothers who are contributing to the health and growth of local churches. In the face of disability and very often great pain, these dear saints are assisting us in the advance of the gospel in rural and regional contexts. The strategies employed (intentionally or otherwise) are thoughtfully examined, distilled and codified by Monica and Louise and those involved in the project. As the Bishop of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, I am moved by the account of grassroots initiatives that seek to include and nurture a wide range of people from within and without our community. To this end, I give thanks to God for this life-giving and practical volume.

The Reverend Dr Mark Short, *National Director of The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia writes:* Since its inception almost 100 years ago, Bush Church Aid has sought to reach Australia for Christ by nurturing Christians in their faith and ministry and strengthening local Christian communities in their mission. This publication stands in that tradition. Monica and Louise have helped us hear the voices, dreams and passions of God's people

living with a disability. Churches in rural and urban Australia are richer for their life and witness. I pray that God will continue to use this resource and their witness to grow the Kingdom down under.

We all believe this publication will provide an invaluable resource for congregations and other Christian ministries. We encourage leadership to reflect on the stories and recommendations and identify ways in which their vision, activities and buildings can be renewed so that the gifts of all God's people might be released for service in God's mission.

Rob Nicholls (Church Engagement Lead for CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program)

The Right Reverend Stuart Robinson, (Anglican Bishop of The Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn)

The Reverend Dr Mark Short, (National Director of The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia)

Executive Summary

This book is the second in a series about the Anglican Church of Australia and its engagement, focusing on people with disabilities living outside capital cities. It addresses the following questions:

- How does the Anglican Church of Australia outside capital cities engage with people living with disabilities?
- What are the intentions, impacts and implications of these engagements?

Twenty people from St Andrew's Anglican Church Braidwood, Refresh F5 Goulburn, St Luke's Anglican Church Junee, All Saints' Anglican Church Marulan, St Jude's Anglican Church Tumbarumba and Yass Valley Anglican Church participated in this research. These six churches are located within the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and actively engage with people living with disabilities.

It was a privilege to hear the testimonies of the participants. I was surprised by the level of agreement they had about church engagements with people living with disabilities. Their testimonies attest that these six churches are exemplars of

successful engagement. The experiences of these churches offer direction for other churches who seek to improve their engagement.

As the research progressed, many participants, partners and/or informants suggested key themes, recommendations and conclusions that were all included in this report. Below is a summary of the key themes and ideas from the interviews:

- The participants living with disabilities wished to share personal narratives about their faith and many were eager to discover more about God. Many were engaged in activities that build up their churches and/or communities.
- As perceived by the participants, engagement went both ways—from their rural church to them and vice versa—and was positive, worthwhile and/or transformative.
- The six rural Anglican churches aimed to overcome structural and attitudinal barriers, and to be public spaces for contemplation concerning the meaning of life for people of all ages.
- Accessible pastoral care, such as listening, sharing time and practical support, spiritually and physically nurtured people living with disabilities,

helped overcome rural and social isolation and complemented services in small towns.

- The joy of managing beautiful historic buildings was tempered by restrictive challenges. Many of the buildings owned by the six rural churches are not consistent with universal design principles and are resistant to modifications. The churches found that continual, intentional, pre-emptive and strategic planning is critical to overcoming structural exclusion and facilitating inclusion.
- Intentionally establishing socially inclusive rural communities of faith, trust and learning involved unifying the dual action of facilitating inclusive networks and accommodating individuals' desire to learn about God and grow in their faith.
- The six Anglican churches appeared to be developing or conceptualising their own Christian social construct of disability. This construct mirrors Jesus' love for all and God and respects the faith, relationship with Christ and gifts of each person. This construct had a positive impact on the participants, their six rural Anglican churches and their local communities.

- The six churches expressed many symbols and aspects of social integration and its associated concepts, such as social justice and social capital. For example, people's names on church rosters are a symbol of social justice, social capital, participation, belonging and equality. These rosters and other symbols or activities continually build and reinforce the identity and self-esteem of the participants living with disabilities.
- By displaying the fruit of the spirit (i.e. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) and being virtuous, the churches attracted people living with disabilities, including their families and friends.
- The implications for rural Anglican church engagements were twofold. First, there was the development of rural Christian communities through which all could belong and know dignity throughout their life and experiences. Second, participants living with disabilities reported the opportunity for hope, a Christian identity and their own mission of inviting others from their networks into their Christian community.

- Each person interviewed was excited about their relationship with God through Jesus, their engagement with their church and the solace they found in their faith and through reading their Bibles. They reported that their faith, eternal hope and God's love and comfort were intrinsic to their identity.

The report's recommendations for rural Anglican churches are summarised below:

1. Members are encouraged to attend training programs and groups, such as mental health first aid training and disability support groups.
2. Leadership teams invite advice from both people living with disabilities and professionals, such as disability support groups, occupational therapists and social workers – about strategies for inclusion, access and engaging with people living with disabilities when planning rural activities and programs.
3. Churches identify and connect with disability services, support groups and networks in their local towns.

4. Churches aim to provide accessible pastoral care for all, regardless of distance.
5. Parish councils intentionally pray for and reflect on the demography of their rural towns and the population trends and needs of groups of people living with disabilities.
6. Churches, in partnership with people living with disabilities, intentionally establish a five-year vision that aims to identify, train and integrate Christians living with disabilities into all leadership teams and church activities.
7. Churches and congregation members intentionally and regularly invite rurally located people living with disabilities to church services and activities.
8. Leadership teams identify accessible town venues for regular accessible church activities.
9. Churches audit their rural environment and consider what effect dominant structures and attitudes have on people living with disabilities who attend church services and activities.
10. Churches are counter-cultural and assume people living with disabilities, regardless of diagnosis, have the ability to learn. Churches

provide opportunities and support so people can participate in ongoing Bible studies, evangelism programs, theological studies and other similar activities.

11. People living with disabilities have opportunities to contribute regularly to church activities and rosters and to minister to others in their rural congregations.
12. Further research is available about church engagement, such as Dr Louise Gosbell's project.
13. Church members celebrate all people and their faith and share stories with others about rural Anglican church engagements with people living with disabilities.

In addition to this investigation into rural Anglican churches, Dr Louise Gosbell from CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program kindly provided the essay, *The experiences of people living with disability in three urban Anglican churches*. Dr Gosbell's essay explained that each interviewed person had a strong sense of belonging to their urban church and participated in church activities. Throughout their life stages, their positive inclusion in their urban churches and the associated friendship and

dignity they received because of their belief that all are made in the image of God contrasted with the participants' experiences in wider society, which excluded them at times. The three urban churches in Dr Gosbell's essay facilitated engagement through the removal of barriers and the participants used their gifts to build their church communities. The essay ends with an introduction to research into urban churches.

Notwithstanding the contextual differences between the three urban centres and the six rural churches—such as urban areas having larger populations and a lower percentage of people identifying as Anglican—both share the following key themes:

- The importance of intentional engagement that facilitated a sense of connection, inclusion, relationship and belonging for people living with disabilities.
- The sustained engagement of people living with disabilities was good for congregations as well as individuals living with or without disabilities.
- Both attitudinal and physical barriers needed to be overcome for positive engagement to

exist between people living with and without disabilities in Anglican churches.

- The Christian perspective that all people are made in the image of God positively influenced and informed the churches' interactions with people living with disabilities.
- For the churches, the implications and culminations of positive engagements were that they respected the faith, gifts and ministries of people living with disabilities and upheld their dignity.

Introduction

This publication is the second in a series about the rural Anglican Church of Australia and its engagements[1]. Faith, community engagement and belonging are central themes that are celebrated throughout this book. The information about rural church engagements is organised into two sections, as shown in the table summarising the layout of the book. Section one introduces the research, key terms—drawing on theological, sociological and social work concepts—and methodology. Section two presents the stories and perceptions of people living with disabilities in rural Australia. Additionally, this book contains a short essay by Dr Louise Gosbell. In it, she introduces themes regarding urban church engagements and her current research project about the urban church.

1 The first book, Three Anglican churches engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, by Monica Short is available at www.bushchurchaid.com.au/monica-short

Table summarising the layout of the book.

Rural

Section One *by Monica Short*

- *Background information*
- *Research aim*
- *Research question*
- *Research purpose*
- *Key concepts*
- *Literature*
- *Methodology*

Rural

Section Two *by Monica Short*

- *Introducing the rural populations and the six Anglican churches*
- *A brief reflection about the field*
- *Participants' stories and the research themes*
- *Conclusion*

Urban

Essay *by Dr Louise Gosbell*

The experiences of people living with disabilities in three urban Anglican churches

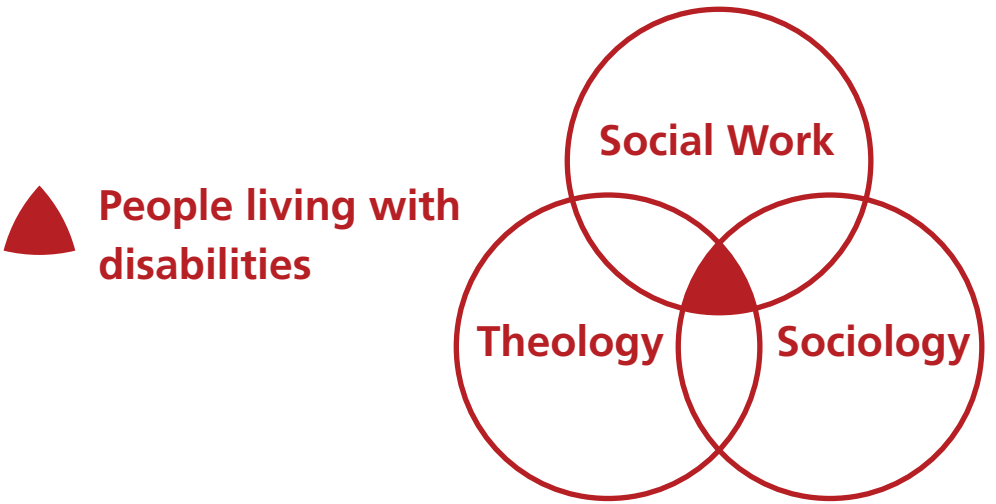
Background

The engagement with and contributions to the rural Anglican Church of Australia by people living with disabilities are significant, noteworthy [1] and a vital part of the Anglican Communion. This project shares exemplars of how social inclusion can be a living expression of mission. It presents the complex beauty of the Christian faith and its expression within a rural community context through the perspectives of 20 people living with disabilities. Their valuable voices narrate a picture of inclusion, belonging, justice, social capital, integration, strength, hope, belief and mission. Tragedy and charity are not dominant discourses in this project.

Aim, Research Questions and Purpose

This research recognises the difference between an urban archetype and the rural experience of the church, even though they can appear similar at times. The research aims to present the emerging themes through a case study of six rural Anglican churches that engage with 20 people living with

disabilities who reside in rural Australia. As indicated below, theological, sociological and social work concepts, described as an integrated lens, underpin the investigation.



An integrated lens: Theological, sociological and social work concepts inform the investigation

The book also aims to awaken people's imagination about how, as a community, the Anglican Church of Australia can better enable people living with disabilities.

The research addresses the following two questions:

- How does the Anglican Church of Australia outside capital cities engage with people living with disabilities?
- What are the intentions, impacts and implications of these engagements?

'Give me your answer'
by Jan Stead

The purpose of this research is to identify themes that can further inform engagement between organisations and people living with disabilities. This research is a partnership between the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia, Charles Sturt University and CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, all of whom have provided excellent support.

Section One: Informing the Narrative

Key Concepts

Faith

Faith is not always religious: it is complex, hard to pin down [2] and difficult to define. Fowler argued that faith is a fundamental category in the human quest for relations to the transcendent, a universal feature of human living and an orientation of the total person towards their hopes, strivings, thoughts and actions [2]. MacKinlay stated that Fowler's definitions of faith and her writing about spiritual development are similar, as both apply a developmental approach [3]. This project agrees with both Fowler and MacKinlay that faith develops through stages for some people living with disabilities. This project also recognises that, for some, faith is a significant event occurring at a particular moment. Kierkegaard, who lived with disabilities all his life, argued that faith is an earnest and significant moment in which a person links themselves to an eternal power for eternity [4]. In

this moment they become conscious of the person they are [4].

Christian Faith

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as ‘confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see’ [5]. Christian faith turns a person’s life towards something beyond ordinary human flourishing [6] and involves following and trusting the person Jesus Christ [7] and His teachings. Christian faith also involves humility [4]; that is, being willing to be humble and honest about oneself before God.

Faith is a strong feature in the Bible’s healing stories [8]. For example, the statement ‘your faith has saved you; go in peace’, was said by Jesus to the woman with a haemorrhage (Mark 5:34, Matthew 9:22 and Luke 8:48), to Bartimaeus who was blind (Mark 10:52 and Luke 18:42) and to one of 10 with leprosy (Luke 17:19) [5, 8].

'Holi Baibul' by Raymond Howes

In the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census, 52 per cent of respondents identified with the Christian faith as their main religion [9]. In the 2011 census, 66 per cent of rural people identified with a Christian denomination compared to 59 per cent of people living in state and territory capital cities [10].

Rurality

'It's a long way'
by Raymond Howes

Elusive terms like rural, regional and remote are hard to define, and there are many associated terms and labels, such as the bush, outback, countryside, country, bucolic, hinterland and agrarian. For example, the ABS refers to other urban, bounded locality and rural balance[2] [12], while the Regional Institute of Australia refers to regional cities, connected lifestyle regions, industry and service hubs and heartland regions [13]. This paper prefers the term rural, interchanges it with 'rural, regional and remote' and defines it as populations

2 According to the ABS (2011), 'section of state' represents an aggregation of non-contiguous geographical areas of a particular urban/rural type. Sections of state categories comprise major urban (i.e. population clusters of 100,000 or more), other urban (i.e. population clusters of 1000 to 99,999), bounded locality (i.e. population clusters of 200 to 999), rural balance (i.e. remainder of state/territory) and migratory and in aggregate cover the whole of Australia [11].

outside capital cities and their immediate surrounding suburbs [14, 15].

The rural archetype differs from an urban setting. In 2016, 33 per cent of people in Australia resided outside of capital cities [16]. Proportionally, there were slightly more people living with disabilities in areas outside than within major cities. In 2009, 22 per cent of people living in inner regional Australia reported living with a disability, compared to 20 per cent living in outer regional or remote Australia and 17 per cent living in major cities [17]. In 2005–06, people living outside of major cities were significantly less likely to have accessed disability support services compared to those living in major cities [18]. Further, in 2011, Aboriginal people were more likely to live with disabilities or long-term health conditions compared to the general population and two thirds of Aboriginal people were living outside of major Australian cities [19].

Church and the Anglican Church of Australia

This project integrates each participant's individual concept of church with the following four definitions. Broughton stated that the Christian church is 'the earthly gathering of God's people called His body' [20], while Pickard explained that the church worships Jesus as Lord and Saviour [21]. Swinton described the church as a place where people find the sovereignty and majesty of God, who created all things [22]. Bonhoeffer argued that a church is a community of spirit and of love that is dependent on the word of God [23]. For this project's purposes, church also refers to both the local congregation and the Universal Christian Church.

Additionally, this project notes Bonhoeffer's critique and challenge of sociological explorations about church, which is not to miss the Christian concept of love [23]. From the beginning of the Christian church, Christian people have come together geographically in mutual love to pray, sing, support each other, learn about Christ and share food [14, 24, 25].

This case study focuses on the Anglican Church of Australia, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion and is organised into 23 Dioceses, including the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn [26, 27]. This Diocese contains both urban and rural parishes. Gallet highlighted that rural parishes are likely to experience different challenges and priorities than metropolitan churches [28].

Disability

Internationally, there are numerous definitions for disability. The World Health Organization describes disability as 'an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions' [29]. The United Nations definition states 'persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' [30].

There are also multiple dimensions of disability and outlined here are two models and a theology

explaining these dimensions. The medical model is associated with diagnosing conditions and the treatment of people living with disabilities [1]. The social model of disability separates impairment and disability [31] and defines disability as the disadvantage or restriction caused by a contemporary organisation that takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and, thus, excludes them from participation in mainstream social activities [32]. Increasingly, disability is observed as a lens that is utilised for both assessing Bible passages, such as the woman living with a haemorrhage in Mark 5:25 [5, 33], and viewing social phenomena, such as church gatherings. Swinton argued that theologies of disability add to the conversation around disability, including the dimension that all human

'Inside our church'. Photo provided by the Parish of Braidwood

beings are gifted and valued because God loves and cares for them in the midst of joys and suffering [22] within their environment.

According to the ABS, in 2012, 18.5 per cent of Australians reported living with a disability and 21 per cent reported long-term health conditions that did not restrict their everyday activities [34]. In 2011, a National Church Life Survey (NCLS) of 1386 church attendees found that 10 per cent of Anglican attendees were living with severe or mild disabilities [35]. The discrepancy between the percentage of Australians and the percentage of church attendees who identified as living with disabilities highlights the need for further investigation into Australian Anglican church engagement [1]. It is unclear from the statistics or literature whether this difference is

'Smile'. Photo provided by Nicole Tillotson

due to church structures creating barriers, people identifying as other than living with disabilities, society undervaluing the spiritual needs of people living with disabilities or other reasons. Nevertheless, the identification of the above mentioned difference highlights the importance of this investigation into engagement.

Engaging Literature

Key themes raised by the participants in this research project were faith, community engagement and belonging, which distinguish it from many other projects in the disability field. These themes centre this book away from ideas of tragedy, charity, paternalism and moralism [1], which can dominate the research and literature on people living with disabilities [36]. This more positive orientation is consistent with contemporary disability of theology thinking, such as Patston's thesis that God, in the book of *Job*, rebuffs the connection between disability, charity and contempt [37]. He argued that God replaced these with wonder, reciprocity and laughter that rejoiced in a world of difference [37].

'Church' by Jan Stead

A unique element of this investigation is its prioritisation of participants' testimonies over a researcher's or theologian's framework. It aimed to be consistent with the literary ideal that the histories and experiences of people living with disabilities are relevant [36] and intriguing. Consequently, this case study listened for meaning in the participants' everyday lives, rather than making assumptions about the participants and their situations [38]. Further, this research was grounded in the lived experience of disability, and aligned itself with social worker Hallahan's viewpoint that it is important to respect knowledge about disability from a variety of

sources even if these sources are not fully knowable through popular methods of analysis [36].

Some literary genres directly present and mirror the voice of participants or individuals living with disabilities. For example, biographies, autobiographies and ethnographies exist but they are often urban-centric. Occasionally, these narratives outline ideas regarding faith, community engagement and belonging. For example, a biography about Australian Mena Ward, who lived with a mitochondrial disorder, described how she belonged to two churches throughout her lifespan and found participating in church to be a lifelong and rewarding experience [39].

The voices of people living with disabilities are mirrored in three ways throughout this project. First, in solidarity with people living with disabilities, the project advocates for positive opportunities within and beyond the rural Anglican church. With some similarities to the work of social workers Pawar and Anscombe, this project challenges all people to be alert to existing societal constraints and aim for communities to be perceived in their entirety [40]. This study suggests that all people matter, including

their experiences, and are connected through a variety of social structures [41], such as the Anglican Church of Australia.

Second, through case studies, this book presents examples of positive engagement in which the participants were valued and embraced within their local churches and vice versa. Each person who lives with a disability is a significant part of their local community—through reciprocal experiences, they build the community while they are being physically and spiritually strengthened.

Third, consistent with CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, this study supports churches to embrace the full diversity of human ability and disability in community [42] so that everyone can come together in Jesus' name to share life, meet God and transmit freedom and hope [43].

Method

This project applied a qualitative approach utilising an illustrative case study method [26]. Participatory qualitative methodology is suited to locating the meanings people place on events, processes and

structures and for connecting these meanings to their social networks [44]. The research collected the narratives (i.e. case studies) of people living with disabilities regarding their experiences attending Anglican churches in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn [44].

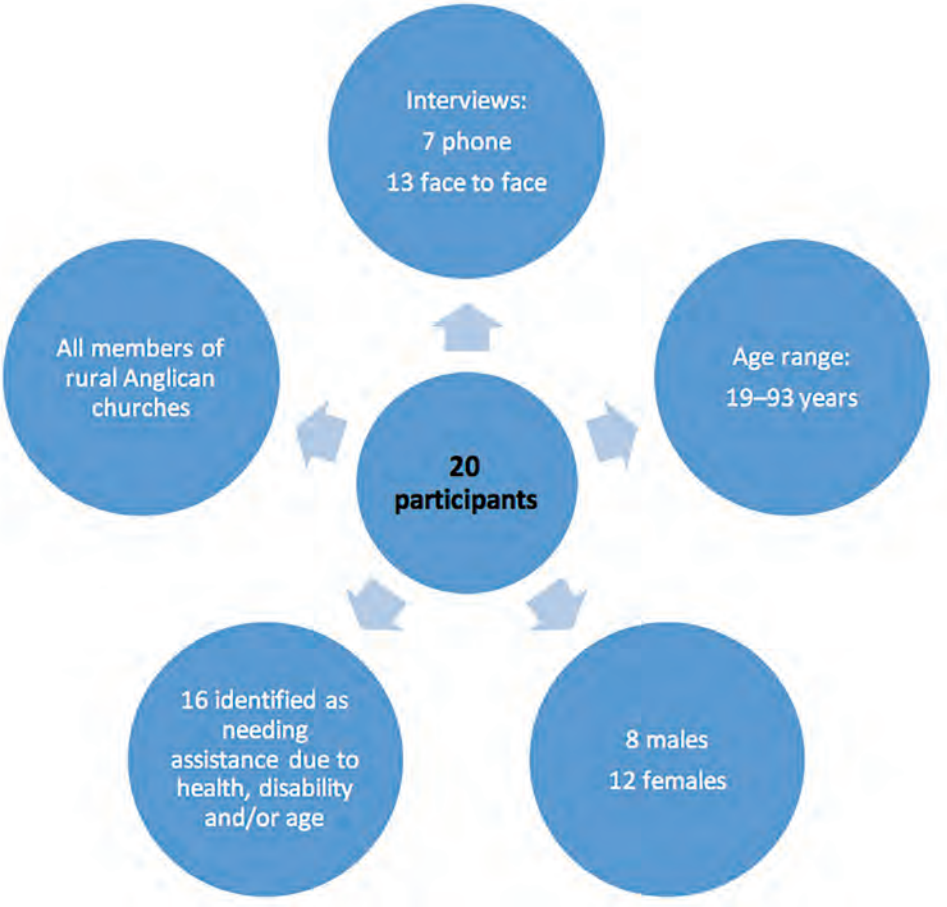
Research informants, such as Diocesan office staff, invited churches to take part in the project. The research used a small purposive sample [26, 44] of six rural churches from the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn that field 'informants' indicated were engaging with people living with disabilities. Churches interested in the project received an email with information about the research and a follow-up phone call (see Appendix A). Snowball sampling was utilised, as one participant/informant introduced other possible participants [26].

The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia and Charles Sturt University provided ethics approval for this project via a National Ethics Application Form. The National Director of Bush Church Aid, Reverend Dr Mark Short and the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and his wife, Stuart and Jan Robinson, provided initial insights

into the process for contacting the churches. As this project progressed, CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program Church Engagement Lead, Robert Nicholls and social researcher Dr Louise Gosbell became partners with the project.[3]

Monica Short is a Christian, member of the Anglican Church of Australia, a social worker, Bush Church Aid volunteer and social researcher with Charles Sturt University. She conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 people from rural churches (see opposite). The data was anonymised (see Appendix A for the permission, statement and consent forms, and the introduction and participant information script, and Appendix B for the semi-structured interview themes). Twenty members from non-urban Anglican churches were interviewed, seven of which were by phone and 13 of which were face-to-face. People interviewed were between

3 Dr Louise Gosbell requested an extension of ethics approval for this project to enable her to investigate urban churches' engagements. The three existing partners and the principal researcher Monica Short supported the suggested extension. Charles Sturt University extended the ethics approval to include urban churches. Dr Louise Gosbell conducted interviews into urban churches and authored the essay, *The experiences of people living with disability in three urban Anglican churches*, that is included in this book. Monica Short designed the research project, conducted the interviews into rural churches engaging with people living with disabilities and authored the remainder of the book.



Participants of the semi-structured interviews

19 and 93 years of age and consisted of eight males and 12 females. Sixteen of the 20 people interviewed identified as needing assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas—self-care, mobility and communication—because of a long-term health condition (lasting six months or

more), disability (lasting six months or more) or old age [45]. These 16 people all identified as active Anglican church members and some were in formal leadership roles.

The interviews were explorative and descriptive and focused on people's experiences of disability, rurality and Anglican churches [44]. The conversations are stored on a password-protected laptop. The interview, coding and writing approach was informed by the disability social advocacy stance of writing 'nothing about us without us' [46] and the collaborative research principle of writing with people rather than about people [47]. Thus, participants, partners and/or informants checked their data, the write up and/or this publication, and many participants suggested key themes, recommendations and conclusions, all of which were included in this report.

Section Two: The Narration (Findings, Themes and Discussions)

Introducing the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn logo. Image provided by the Diocese

Initially established in 1863 as the Diocese of Goulburn, the Diocese was renamed the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in 1950 [48, 49].

The Diocese spans south-eastern New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory and includes the South Coast, Snowy Mountains and south-west slopes region [50].

In 2016, the Diocese included 59 parishes and specialist ministries [49]. The next subsection introduces the rural churches involved in the research.

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.
Map provided by the Diocese

Introducing the Rural Population Centres and the Churches

Braidwood

For tens of thousands of years prior to colonisation, the Aboriginal people of the Dhurga language group and the Yuin nation occupied the land that is now called Braidwood [51]. Braidwood is part of the NSW Southern Tablelands and is listed on the State Heritage Register as a historic town [52]. The site of the Braidwood township was resumed by the government of the day in 1833, and its history includes stories of Yuin society and social activism, cattle and sheep farming, gold rush, beautiful buildings, small businesses, cottage industries, hobby farms and the emergence of writers, potters, artists, poets and historians [53]. According to the local council, 1744 people resided in Braidwood in 2016 [54]. In 2011, 67.5 per cent of people living in Braidwood identified as Christian and 2.9 per cent of residents ticked the 'need assistance due to disabilities' census box [55].

St Andrew's Anglican Church Braidwood.
Photo provided by St Andrew's

St Andrew's Anglican Church, Braidwood

The Anglican Parish of Braidwood describes itself as middle to high church and includes the centres of Braidwood, Majors Creek, Ballalaba, Araluen and Gundillion [56]. The St Andrew's Braidwood Church building was completed in 1892 [57]. The parish's vision is 'to become a Church that reaches out to its community, with a strong desire to communicate the good news of God's love in Jesus, to serve the Church community and the community at large and to draw people into the company of those who

worship the risen Lord' [56]. St Andrew's hosts a diverse range of Christian activities, including church services, retreats, breakfasts, prayer meetings, fellowship groups, baptisms, weddings, funerals, children's activities, thanksgiving for garlic harvest services, dinners, stalls and fairs [58]. The church also runs a project in which they loan iPads, including iPads for general loan, iPads with a Skype facility for people in hospital so they can maintain access to their parish, friends and family and iPads that film parts of the Sunday service that is then broadcast in real time via YouTube to people unable to leave their homes. Further, people living with disabilities are involved in all church structures and activities, including preaching and pastoral care.

Goulburn

Goulburn was a meeting place for the Mulwaree, Tarlo, Burra Burra, Wollondilly, Wiradjuri, Gundungurra, Dharrook, Tharawal, Lachlan, Pajong, Parramarragoo, Cookmal and Ngnunawal peoples [59]. Sadly, throughout the 19th century, disease wiped out the majority of the original inhabitants

[59]. Goulburn, the major centre of the Southern Tablelands, was settled by white people in 1818 and was relocated to its current location in 1828 [60]. Its history includes narratives about fishing, hunting, corroborees, epidemic diseases, regional administration and public services, such as policing and railway, architectural creativity, such as the building of St Saviour's Cathedral and agricultural ventures [60]. In 2011, the population of Goulburn was 21,092 people, 31.2 per cent of whom identified as Anglican and six per cent of whom ticked the 'need assistance due to disabilities' census box [61, 62].

Refresh F5, Goulburn

Fellowship at 5 (F5) is a contemporary outreach-focused congregation designed to connect people in creative and practical ways. It meets weekly at 5 pm in Christ Church Hall, which opened in 1965 in west Goulburn [63]. It describes its style as 'open and orthodox', using simple Anglican liturgy [64]. Communion is celebrated regularly and the music style is both contemporary and traditional [64].

F5 embraces the five marks of mission for the Anglican Communion:

1. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God
2. To reach, teach, baptise and nurture new disciples in Christ
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth [65].

Fellowship at 5 meets in Christ Church, West Goulburn. Photo provided by F5

A number of F5 members identify as living with disabilities and are active volunteers within the church.

Junee

The Wiradjuri word Junee means ‘speak to me’ [66]. The Wiradjuri people were the original inhabitants of this country, followed by Europeans in 1840 [66]. The European history of this town is associated with the history of the railway in the south-west slopes region of NSW [66], and agriculture, small business and correctional services are also part of the Junee story. In 2011, the population of Junee was 5878 people, of whom 26 per cent identified as Anglican and 5.5 per cent ticked the ‘need assistance due to disabilities’ census box [67].

St Luke’s Anglican Church, Junee

St Luke’s was built in 1889 [48], is the largest church in the Junee Parish and describes itself as middle church. The church previously had a charismatic ministry and currently has an evangelical minister. The parish’s vision includes a desire for everyone to ‘experience the love of God revealed through the forgiveness that only comes through Jesus’ [69]. St Luke’s holds weekly church services, supports

religious education in schools, runs a children's ministry called Kids' Club, facilitates activity groups, supports inter-church council activities, holds Bible study growth groups and prayer meetings, provides monthly visits to out-centre churches and operates an opportunity shop [48]. People living with disabilities are active members of the church and involved in all ministries.

St Luke's Anglican Church Junee [68]. Photo provided by St Luke's

Marulan

Marulan is located in the exact middle of the Eastern Standard Time Zone [70]. Prior to European settlement, it was the junction for at least four Aboriginal territories, consisting of the Gundungarra, Wadi, Wandandian and Ngunnawal peoples [71]. In 1828, Europeans surveyed the area

All Saints' Anglican Church Marulan. Photo provided by All Saints'

and white settlement started around the same time [71]. Marulan's history includes conflicts, such as a clash between Aboriginal people and stockmen and holdups by bushrangers Ben Hall and his gang and Lowry [71]. In 2011, the population of Marulan was 1382, 30.5 per cent of whom identified as Anglican [72]. Similar to Goulburn, six per cent of people ticked the 'need assistance due to disabilities' census box [61, 62].

All Saints' Anglican Church, Marulan

All Saints' Marulan, a Wingello sandstone church, dates back to 1878 and describes itself as middle church [73]. This church focuses on the gifts people have and encourages everyone to be involved in church activities. An informal, interactive church

service occurs twice a month, with all services aiming to be accessible to people living with disabilities and a place where all people belong. This is both professionally and personally important to the ministry family the Landfords [74].

Tumbarumba

Nestled in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, Tumbarumba is part of the Snowy Valley Shire Council that is currently home to 3500 people [75]. The Walgalu are the traditional owners of the land [76]. Tumbarumba's heritage includes the history of gold, timber, agriculture and the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme [77]. In 2011, 29 per cent of people identified as Anglican [78] and about five per cent of people ticked the 'need assistance due to disabilities' census box [79].

St Jude's Anglican Church, Tumbarumba

Tumbarumba became a parish in 1904 [80]. Together with the neighbouring parish of Batlow, it is now part of the South West Slopes Ministry

District [81]. St Jude's Tumbarumba describes itself as low church evangelical, experiencing charismatic renewal in the 1970s. St Jude's purpose is to proclaim the love of God for all and to bring people into His Kingdom [81]. It abides by two principles: its foundations rest upon Jesus as Saviour rather than buildings or bureaucracies [81], and the church's strength is in the ministry of all believers, recognising all people have gifts given by the Holy Spirit [81]. St Jude's conducts weekly services and has communion twice a month. It runs a children's ministry called Kids' Club, youth group, special religious education also known as Scripture, annual summer missions with the Scripture Union, Bible study groups, fortnightly nursing home and day-centre services and activity groups [82]. People living with disabilities are active members whose

St Jude's Anglican Church Tumbarumba. Photo provided by St Jude's

gifts build up the congregation, such as by providing pastoral care.

Yass

The Aboriginal Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri tribes are the traditional inhabitants of the Yass Valley area [83], and Europeans settled in Yass in the 1820s [84]. The history of Yass includes stories about Aboriginal campsites, agriculture (particularly wool), being a transport centre, small businesses and tourism [85].

St Clement's Anglican Church [89]. Photo provided by St Clement's

In 2015, the population of the Yass Valley Council area was 16,564 people [86]. In 2011, 28.5 per cent of the population identified

as Anglican [87] and 4.1 per cent ticked the 'need assistance due to disabilities' census box [88].

Yass Valley Anglican Church

St Clement's Anglican Church was built in 1850 [85] and conducts contemporary, liturgically traditional, family friendly services and church services specific to nursing homes [90, 91]. The St Clement's webpage states that St Clements 'believes that following Christ is a whole of life experience' and that it aims to help people seek a relationship with God that is authentic and real [90]. The church has a campanology (bell-ringing) group, Jacob's Well Resource Centre, community garden, ministry to seniors, Bible studies, irregular social activities and community dinners. People living with disabilities are warmly welcomed and active in the church's activities, such as participating in church dinners.

A Brief Reflection about Rural Churches

Differences exist between each of the six rural churches. The most notable difference is that

each church has its own unique character, style of congregational life and approach to organisation. In sociological and liturgical terms, the style of each church varies from formal and traditional to informal and contemporary. In theological terms, the style of congregational life is high church, which strictly follows the prayer book, through to low church, orthodox and a simple liturgy. Overall, evangelical, charismatic, middle and Anglo-Catholic churches/congregations volunteered to take part in this project.

The style of congregational life of the six churches did not appear to define or decide the churches' engagement with people living with disabilities or their engagement with the churches. Rather, the people interviewed described their engagement through narratives, such as stories about their relationship with God and others.

Notably, all six churches deeply valued engaging with people living with disabilities. The people living with disabilities actively belonged in all six churches and were noticeable leaders in four of the six churches. The themes of engagement mentioned below were consistent across all six churches.

How do Rural Anglican Churches Engage with People Living with Disabilities and How are the Engagements Perceived?

This subsection links the perceptions of the participants about rural Anglican church engagements and the three disciplines—theology, social work and sociology—upholding the integrated lens. It is helpful to note that the three disciplines are interconnected and the points below are not exclusive to each field.

Person 7: *I love church.*

Person 4: *I love the whole atmosphere.*

Love and its synonyms were recurring themes in the participants' descriptions about their rurally located churches and their church engagement. All participants perceived their church's engagements as positive, worthwhile and transformative. Overall, the participants' descriptions indicated that reciprocal engagement occurred between the participant and their church and vice versa. Each of the six churches engaged both collectively and individually with their congregation members living with disabilities.

An analysis of these engagements indicated many *theologically focused* connections [26]. For example, collectively, the churches were intentionally engaging with the participants through church services, Bible study or teaching groups and church-based ministries, and individually, this was occurring through practical activities, such as pastoral care and hospitality. Theological concepts, such as all are made in the image of God, appeared to inform the churches' motivations in engaging with people living with disabilities.

Some engagements described by participants had commonalities with service, *social work or welfare* [26] and critical thinking. Crisp, a social worker who wrote about people's spiritual needs, argued the importance of meaningful connections that enhance people's lives [92]. While the participants were not receiving a social work service from their churches, there did exist among participants reflections of social work ideals about human rights, such as respect, examples of service and meaningful connections [93]. The participants identified collective, community-based, welfare-informed strategies that improved their connections

with their local communities. For example, some participants indicated their church prevented social barriers by facilitating social inclusion, inviting people to attend and/or belong to church groups and organising community development activities. The participants also identified person-centred strategies that created connections, including assessing and meeting the needs of individuals, such as coordinating transport to events, teaching people skills and providing debriefing and counselling relating to complicated social structures or situations.

Some engagements aligned with *sociological thinking* about social constructs and community interactions within rural settings [26] and with the idea that each church is imbued with norms, values and beliefs that may resonate with their prevailing culture [94]. Participants repeatedly indicated that as a collective body, their rural churches had embedded norms, such as welcoming, acceptance and willingness to modify disabling social and physical structures and barriers so that people living with disabilities could belong. Observable examples of these norms included the provision

of large-print Bibles and service sheets, relocating pews to accommodate wheelchairs, modifying sound systems and encouraging signing. Rural churches also reasonably accommodated individuals so they could contribute to the church, such as by being included on church rosters and tailoring Bible study notes.

The information in the following subsections of Section Two explores these above mentioned perceptions. These subsections present the current thinking regarding engagement in church practice within the context of rural participants' testimonies about faith, community engagement and belonging, rather than in hypothetical understandings.

Observations: Intentions, Impacts and Implications

The information below is organised under three subsections: Intentional Engagements, Impacts of Engaging and Implications of Engaging. The people interviewed were excited to share their stories via this book. They spoke clearly about their faith, were determined to present their knowledge to others and were eager to discover more about God and/or how

to intentionally build up their rural churches and local communities.

Intentional Engagements

All six churches intentionally included people living with disabilities, and aimed to provide a public space through which people could contemplate what gives their life meaning [95] throughout their lifespan. This is observed in the following quote:

Person 20: *Parish council has a philosophy that church is for the whole of your life [everyone] whenever you start [attending]. We engage with you throughout your life—and do whatever is needed.*

Intentions, such as those outlined in the above quote and in the next subsection, required the six churches to be willing to listen to people about the challenges they found in their locality, church and personal life and consider the actions required to assist people to flourish in their towns. Pastoral care is one practical way the churches demonstrated such intentions.

Accessible Pastoral Care

'Dropping in' by Jan Stead

Pastoral care incorporates intentionally living out the gospel in today's society, serving others so they know the dignity of being a child of God and enabling others to enjoy knowing Jesus Christ [96]. This occurs when Christians serve others through listening, responding, praying and providing caring practical support [97] and involves many aspects, such as simple acts of kindness to planned care strategies [98].

For chaplains Ranse and Jamieson, pastoral care included offering time and friendship, being reliable, journeying alongside people, empathising and listening to life stories [99]. It also included strengthening, comforting and encouraging others

and urging people to live a life of faith that is pleasing to God [97].

According to Bishop Stuart Robinson, the clergy of the Australian Anglican Church have a primary responsibility for ensuring God's people are cared for [100] alongside parish councils and members of the local congregation. In the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, all are encouraged to be conduits of God's love to others and to show love, generosity and kindness because God is gracious through Jesus [101]. Jasmine's story is an example of rural church-based pastoral care.

Jasmine's testimony

> Jasmine (name changed and information anonymised) is a widow. Her vision is deteriorating and she receives assistance from a large disability service. She lives independently in her own home in rural Australia, has many friends and is a dynamic member of her local church.
>
> Jasmine described how her minister visited the day her husband died and at other times.

She said it is helpful talking with him. Jasmine explained it was becoming difficult to follow the readings in a church service and wondered whether she could keep going to church. The minister noticed her struggles and provided her with audio resources so she could listen to the Bible passages read at church when she was at home. Jasmine found the resources helpful and loved hearing the New Testament stories, which she repeatedly plays. It has restored her enjoyment of church. Jasmine describes this pastoral support as 'wonderful'.

Pastoral care, such as that described by Jasmine, can be important for two reasons. First, it spiritually and physically nurtures rural people. Second, it helps overcome social and rural isolation and builds the local rural community by supplementing the few accredited services that exist in rural areas, such as hospitals. This is highlighted in the following quote:

Person 5: *There is nothing [i.e. services] here for the [name of disability]. You have services in Sydney in Canberra… [This is one of] those spots where [name of town] gets forgotten. In country*

towns, a lot of [people living with a particular disability] are ignored. That is where [church name] is different, they are trying to integrate everyone in and [are] monitoring their welfare.

Like Person 5, many participants treasured their church's pastoral services, in particular three elements of pastoral care: listening to others, sharing time and practical support, such as transport.

As suggested by the following quote, the first element, listening to others, is a vital component of pastoral care:

Person 4: *I have depression… They are very good listeners. A church needs to have somebody that anyone can go to and talk. [Someone who] makes others feel listened to.*

For Person 4, feeling heard is important. Sadly, not all participants in the research always felt heard by congregation members as illustrated below:

Person 2: *Not everyone is good at listening. For example, I was asked by a church member to help [with an activity]... I explained I could not help because I cannot [complete an action] and yet the person was persistent… I felt excluded because I*

could not read… Exclusion is something that can be avoided.

Second, sharing time is also fundamental to pastoral care. Dimensions of time were identified by participants and can be summarised as people patiently and intentionally sharing time with others, taking time to hear a person's own analysis of their situation and making time to empower others. Pastoral care can occur at any time since sharing and support is not only for times when people are in hospital [102].

A third element of pastoral care is practical support in attending activities and services. People living in rural locations sometimes travel long distances to access churches and may need assistance with transport. This is shown by the following example:

Person 2: *Church is 45 min away from where we live so it limits what we can get involved in and [husband's name] is working so I cannot do things during the day.*

Similar to Person 2, a number of participants were dependent on relatives, carers or friends to transport them to church activities. One person

interviewed resides out of town and explained that there were no accessible, alternative transport networks in her area and was uncomfortable asking for lifts to church. This is because in rural areas, public or private transport services can be limited to Monday to Friday school runs and are generally not available on evenings or Sunday. This lack of transport can cause social and rural isolation. A number of participants greatly appreciated the pastoral and practical support of congregation members to access Christian and other activities. Some participants had a wide rural church support network:

'Are we there yet?' By Raymond Howes

Person 8: *They pick [us up] to go out to the farm [for craft group] which is over half an hour away. They bring us back home again, and one picks us up every Sunday to go to church. If she is unable to come, she gets her brother or*

someone like that to come and pick us up and take us to church.

On arrival at church or an activity, Person 8 and others need to be able to navigate the grounds and access the venue.

Intentionally Overcoming Challenges of Beautiful Old Buildings, Conflicting Legislation and Structural Exclusion

Congregational activities mostly occur within buildings [103] and these congregational artefacts are a silent statement of church activities and values [104]. Rural buildings can be vast, inflexible spaces that are expensive to maintain and resistant to modifications. Five of the six rural churches involved in this case study are located in historic buildings. The sixth church meets in a hall that was built at a time when universal design principles were becoming more popular. Universal design 'means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design' [30].

Managing beautiful rural buildings that do not reflect universal design or facilitate accessibility and inclusion is complex. The intricacy of finite budgets, legislation and/or policies that focus on protecting heritage requires careful consideration by the rural churches when intentionally engaging with people living with disabilities. Managing the consequences of the unintentional exclusion of people caused by structures and legislation tested the innovation and problem-solving skills of the six rural churches. In this study, the six churches made intentional decisions to creatively confront barriers:

Person 11: *The main thing is the church building itself. How to work it for people with disabilities. It is a [very old rural] building… need to work around it.*

Person 20: *I realise we need to make boundaries pliable.*

Designing workarounds and being 'pliable' or adaptable, as described by Persons 11 and 20, meant different things for each of the six churches. Examples of such workarounds included organising portable ramps and, as it was not possible to widen a particular door, rearranging pews near a second entry so scooters could drive into a church. Other examples

'There is a way forward' by Raymond Howes.

of inclusive workarounds included distributing Bible readings in advance of the service so people living with vision impairment could upload the reading to computer tablets, redesigning the morning tea table with wheels, changing the sound system, holding off-site midweek services, assisting with transport, adding signs and placing large-print information in accessible places. As illustrated by the quote below, these intentional actions provided rural Australians with the message that they are important to the church community:

Person 19: *I [am] treated very specially.*

Some participants considered pre-emptive and strategic planning as key to inclusion:

Person 20: *The secret is do it before it is needed… [It is about being] inclusive of groups, even of a group you do not have to worry about at the moment.*

Participants like Person 20 found implementing pre-emptive plans challenging at times and two examples of these challenges included:

1. Individual church members undermined improvements as observed in **Person 3's** comment that 'a previous church I attended had someone who said they do not have people with disabilities attending so why fix [the building]'.
2. Opaque, congregational understandings of how physical barriers limit engagement, evangelism, attendance and church growth, such as **Person 3's** explanation, '[At a previous church we attended] people came up to church and said I would love to join you but I cannot get in. Rural parishes are well known for tree roots, rabbit holes, the ground is uneven.'

Many participants argued the need for rural churches to continually strive to overcome

structural exclusion. Participants recognised that every attempt to address social exclusion and rural isolation resulted in social inclusion because it made people living with disabilities feel important to their community of faith.

Intentionally Establishing Socially Inclusive Rural Communities of Faith, Trust and Learning

Research indicates that Australian churches are generally better at providing major physical accessible facilities, such as parking spaces, reasonably good at minor physical adjustments, such as hearing loops, but less able to adapt programs to people's needs or achieving an inclusive culture [105]. Social inclusion is:

> *The process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life... An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between an individual's rights and duties and increased social cohesion [106].*

'Hands raised heavenwards in praise' by Jan Stead

Participants commented that the six rural Anglican churches promoted a culture of connection, trust and inclusion within their community:

Person 2: *The goal is to be inclusive for everyone, as much as we possibly can do.*

Person 4: *Six or seven of us… go. There we learn about different books of the Bible. We talk and share our problems. With the women's Bible group, there is the trust. Trust is really, really important.*

Further, participants indicated that the six churches present the ideal of an attractive and attentive community of memory and hope that understands

what it means to remember people [22] as indicated by the comments below:

Person 3: *There is something about that community, they are just willing to act and help people.*

Person 4: *They will talk to you… If you are sitting there and someone comes up and they will include you in a conversation, you are not left out ... It makes a really good atmosphere in the church and in the whole group.*

The four previous quotes suggest that the six rural churches ensured their atmosphere, actions and language encompassed all people. For example, one church relaxed their Sunday service to accommodate people living with intellectual disabilities:

Person 11: *We got prayer… songs… Bible reading. Sometimes we do a sermon, other times a discussion. The discussion has been well received by everyone including people with disabilities. It allows people to ask questions... Easier for someone with learning disabilities. We will have a passage, split into small groups and then have questions. What do you think it means and what will we do about it? It is an interactive*

discussion. Easy to do in a small rural church.

As the above quote explains, this rural Anglican church service format was possible because the church is both small and rural; however, as explained by Person 2, larger urban churches may find it more difficult to be flexible:

Person 2: *City parishes are bigger and you get lost in the crowd. Rural churches go the extra mile. I do not know if this is a fair statement or not.*

Such an inclusive and flexible culture involves unifying the dual actions of *facilitating inclusive networks* and *accommodating individuals' desires to learn* about God and grow in their faith.

In terms of *facilitating inclusive networks*, the research recognised that life brings a multiplicity of relationships [4]. Some participants living with disabilities found navigating relationships in their local rural towns complicated, confusing and/or overwhelming:

Person 4: *I have a problem meeting people.*

Participants explained that this was because they could not always understand what was happening around them and experienced in open/broader

society moments of feeling let down, humiliation and worse. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Person 4: *[At school] I was bullied because I was different.*

Bullying and other similar actions result in distrust. Consequently, people can resort to staying home where they feel safe and secure. In contrast, the six churches valued relationships and empowered people with complex pasts to feel equal, safe and significant in their churches and local towns. The churches' networks of trust were pathways to people knowing others in their community. Joy's story demonstrates this.

Joy's testimony

Joy (name changed and information anonymised) has lived with disabilities throughout her life. Joy found mixing with people confusing at times, often not understanding what people were saying or doing. She used to avoid going into her town's CBD, and if she did go she quickly shopped. On moving to a new town, Joy did not know anyone and avoided contact with people, mostly staying home where she felt secure.
A neighbour invited Joy to church. She was extremely sceptical about church, but went because the neighbour was kind and intentionally looked out for her. Surprisingly to Joy, she enjoyed church. Everyone was very friendly. She kept going back. She had not read the Bible and decided to read it for herself out of curiosity. She then joined a Bible study group and enjoyed learning about God and was often weeks in advance with her reading and preparation. She found that she trusted this group.

After a while, Joy felt missed by people when she did not go to church and realised that she missed them too. Before she knew it,

> when she walked down the street, she would see people from the church and join them and their friends for coffee. Joy realised church has provided her with a network of relationships. She feels included. Joy found she now belongs at church, down the street and in the town. She is actively helping others at church and making her community a better place [107].[4]

For Joy and other participants, church made them feel secure and able to bond with others. When they moved towns or tried something new, their church helped them orientate themselves to their new locations or experiences. Their church also respected their desire to engage with God through the Bible.

The second action by these churches that created an inclusive, flexible culture was accommodating individuals' desires to learn. Many participants indicated an eagerness to discover new things about God and their churches facilitated these learning opportunities. They appreciated their

4 Part of this subsection was originally printed in the article *Belonging: Social work, sociological and theological insights into engagements with people living with disabilities* by Monica Short in the 2017 Winter AASW NSW Branch Newsletter on disability, p. 29. The author is grateful to AASW NSW Branch for permission to reprint the information here.

churches' norm that all people are able to grow in knowledge and understanding of God throughout their lifespan despite educational achievements. This is illustrated in the comments below about Bible study groups:

'The Old Book'
by Jan Stead

Person 4: *I have started reading the Bible. I am up to [a particular book in the Bible]. I find it very heavy the Old Testament but it is good… I enjoy the Bible studies so will do… homework in advance… I love learning.*

Person 7: *I went to a disability [high] school because could not read or write… [Name of a day of the week] is Bible study… It makes me feel good… It is good.*

The majority of participants, including Persons 4 and 7, felt respected and treated as an equal in their lifelong learning about God and enjoyed learning from the Bible in their community. They appreciated

people taking the time to explain clearly Bible passages, for example:

Person 7: *[People's names] there that help… Sometimes I need help with the questions.*

Additionally, others listened to, encouraged, sought opinions and asked for assistance with their own learning about Bible passages. A number of participants were excited about their insights into the Bible and wished to share these insights with others:

Person 7: *The eBook [Exodus]… you get a lot of stuff out of it. You get to know the law. It is very, very, very, very important. You get to know how Jesus died on the cross for us and how Jesus sacrificed himself for us. Without it, you do not know what Jesus had done for you.*

The quotes above outline that such exchanges had a positive impact and helped people engage in rural Anglican church communities.

Impacts of Engaging

Community engagement can be positive or negative. Positive engagements occurs when

communities value personal relationships, collective responsibilities and social cohesion [108]. According to Halpern, negative engagement occurred when a community does not uphold its social capital and the wellbeing of people [41]. Underinvestment, exclusion [41], exploitation of individuals' goodwill and/or injustice also led to negative engagement.

Conscious and unconscious constructions about disability by churches and congregation members can determine if their engagement with people living with disabilities are virtuous or iniquitous and inclusive or exclusive. McNair argued for a Christian social construct of disability within churches that emulated Jesus' love for His neighbour, enemies and God [109]. The six rural churches aimed to do this. Consequently, their loving engagements promoted a public voice for people living with disabilities, including their faith, needs and experiences in rural towns. Church members living with disabilities reciprocated by utilising their gifts and abilities to build up their churches and communities and this is described in the following subsections.

Respecting the Gifts of People Living with Disabilities and Hearing their Stories about Faith and Love

Drawing on Biblical material, many theologians like Eiesland argued that all are made in the image of God [110] and worthy of respect. According to the Australian Association of Social Workers, respecting people involves recognising the unique, equal and inherent worth of each person [93]. It challenges the dualistic thinking of 'us versus them', 'able versus disabled' and accommodates exceptions. For example, respect supports ideas like the Kierkegaardian view that a person's accomplishments are not defined by power, talent or activity level, rather an individual accomplishes as equally as others [4] and a person's accomplishments are based on the value that every person is significant [4] and lovable. This Kierkegaardian view overcomes selfish definitions of accomplishment that focus on 'my' (individual) success [4].

The rural Anglican churches and participants in this project took a Christ-like approach, respectfully seeing everyone as equal with gifts and abilities.

Nelson argued that a Christian's faith development involves engaging with a community that nurtures their faith, gifts and relationship with Christ [7]. The six churches were nurturing people living with disabilities:

Person 11: *We are trying to foster that everyone has gifts given to them by God. We do not work on a deficit theory… Finding their gifts and what they are good at. Allowing others to do things and be thankful for them.*

As explained below, nurturing people involved spending time getting to know people and their strengths:

Person 12: *It is more than seeing [people] … It is knowing them.*

Participants living with disabilities shared their gifts and abilities, which had a positive impact on others, their churches and their communities. This respectful reception of their actions empowered people living with disabilities. Further, congregations were positively impacted and constructed and shared beautiful stories about how their church respectfully engaged with people and about how God was transforming people's lives. This is true for Jack.

Jack's testimony

As a young man, Jack (name changed and information anonymised) was in a serious car crash. Later in life, Jack retired from work early due to stress. Jack also has severe [name of three chronic health conditions] and lives with pain. He takes inhibitors, a medication that affects his movements. Jack is part of the lay leadership and lay team at his rural church. He leads church services, preaches, organises promotional and other materials, runs meetings, provides pastoral care and writes reports. The church has contingency plans for when Jack is unwell. Jack finds church energising, declaring, 'Church is keeping me alive'. Jack prays. He described a time when God answered his prayers. Jack started a church service in pain. With great excitement, he outlined how his pain dissipated as the service progressed. Jack says this has happened many times.

In reflecting on his testimony, Jack highlighted the impact of living with a disability and working within a team in a small rural church community:

Jack: *There are many ways to do the same things, but much can be done as a team.*

To reinforce this observation, he quoted the following Bible passage:

Jack: *Psalm 133:1, 'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity'.*

Other participants also spoke of their churches respectfully engaging with them. For example, many people interviewed enjoyed the morning tea after their rural church service because people showed genuine interest in them and made them feel loved and important. There is no payment, compulsion, charity or pity involved with these exchanges. These participants cherished laughing with the congregation members, teasing about eating cake, praying with others about their worries or hearing testimonies about others' Christian life.

Morning tea positively impacted these participants, and for them, symbolised community, made them feel fulfilled and included and grew social capital.

'Cuppa tea and cake?' by Jan Stead

Symbols Representing Social Integration

Sometimes church congregational identities and cultures are captured through a metaphor, image [104] or symbol of sociality, such as the previously mentioned morning tea that symbolises community. Symbols are actions and/or visible objects that give meaning, emotion or value to a behaviour or cultural product [111] and can represent spirituality at its deepest level [112]. Socially and culturally, symbols can connect people to meanings that are too deep to be expressed in words, for example when sharing Holy Communion [3].

Sociality is a fundamental aspect of humanity and this is recognised in the Bible [113]. Consequently, the church contains many symbols of social integration and associated concepts, such as social justice and social capital [114].

Social Integration

Social integration creates:

> *A more stable, safe and just society for all, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society must be based on the principles of embracing—not coercing or forcing—diversity and using participatory processes that involve all stakeholders in the decision-making that affects their lives [115].*

Social integration is an umbrella term for a number of 'social' concepts and is associated with social capital and social justice [114]. In rural Australia, social symbols about social integration can be limited due to the size of populations, distance from cities and lack of resources. For a number of the research participants living with disabilities,

rural church rosters were a social image symbolising social integration, and observing their name on a roster symbolised their inclusion and contribution to their local rural community's social networks and capital. Each issued roster was a statement of solidarity—their church knew by name the person living with disabilities, thought they had ability and was an equal member in God's family. Each roster built and reinforced the identity and self-esteem of the participants living with disabilities. Interviewees indicated that the rosters made them feel important and noticed as illustrated below through Joan's story.

Joan's testimony

> Joan (name changed and information anonymised) explained that her school and family often thought she was unable to contribute to activities and that decisions were made for or about her rather than by her. She was genuinely surprised and delighted when the minister of her church asked if she would serve on the rosters for morning tea, collect the offertory and

> welcome people to church. Joan explained that she thrived through helping and felt great every time the roster came out with her name listed. Joan sat straight, spoke confidently and smiled widely when she talked about the rosters.
>
> The minister of the church explained that Joan thanked him most weeks for allowing her to serve on the rosters. He thought it should be him thanking her for volunteering, as Joan genuinely helped him and the whole church.

It is clear from this story that Joan's rural church encouraged her to flourish, which has enhanced the social capital of the church and, thus, the social capital of the town.

Social Capital

Church congregations are effective generators of social capital because they facilitate communication and trust [116]. According to Kaldor, Hughes and Black, social capital is the 'glue which holds a community together' [117]. It constitutes bonds with friends and/or family and social networks,

links to organisations [118] and creates opportunities for cooperation by ensuring mutually advantageous outcomes for all involved [41]. The interviewees shared stories, symbols and practices about social capital, such as participating in small Bible study groups, craft and social groups and community-based outreach activities, being listed in church directories and on rosters and helping with Scripture, Kids' Club and youth groups. This is illustrated in Joseph's story.

Joseph's testimony

> Joseph (name changed and information anonymised) lives with multiple impairments. Joseph loves God, the Bible, his local community, talking with people and helping others. He explained that because he is a Christian, he volunteers at a Kids' Club and youth group, opens the community kitchen that feeds local people, is on church rosters and mows people's lawns. The local minister described Joseph as one of the godliest people he knows and explained that Joseph makes his community a better place for many people.

'Standing beside others' by Jan Stead

Participants like Joseph explained that volunteering and building up their community is a flow-on from their relationship with God, and involves being sent out by Jesus to love and serve others [119].

Social Justice

Broughton chronicled how faithful disciples of Jesus create justice [20]. Justice means a fair distribution of benefit to all in society and ensures more burdens are not placed on the most vulnerable members of society [8]. A just society is one that respects

the dignity of all individuals and is one in which all work together in harmony for mutual good [120]. Appeals to justice can awaken moral imagination, motivate people to critically examine their society and question how justice can be more liberating and enabling [121]. In discussions about injustice, it is important to note that rural Australia consists of a number of Australia's most disadvantaged postcodes [122] and many rural locations are experiencing economic decline, the collapse of traditional markets, withdrawal of services [123] and increasing rural isolation.

Justice can include working in solidarity [124] with rural Australian residents. Solidarity means that we understand we have a shared humanity and the duty to support and help each other [8]. It is a means for ensuring equality exists for all who follow Christ [125].

Justice, solidarity, shared power, accessibility and the contestation of ableism (the assumption that everyone is able-bodied) can be indicators of the integrity of a church [126]. Rural churches that actively respond to injustice with integrity and follow

Christ's example of restoring relationships bring justice with reconciliation [20] to their locations.

In this project, observable examples of grassroots social justice, solidarity, shared power, accessibility, equality and the contestation of ableism included people living with disabilities being representatives on parish council, committees and rosters and being able to make significant decisions about church activities. Such actions recognised that all are equal image bearers of God and deserving of respect, dignity, care and inclusion [127].

When social justice is expressed as Christ-like love, the impact is profound and means people such as Joan and Joseph know honour, dignity, justice and love [128]. Love is a segment of the fruit of the spirit.

Being Virtuous and Displaying the Fruit of the Spirit Attracts People Living with Disabilities

This case study into church engagements brought ethical attention to people living with disabilities in rural areas. This is consistent with an approach known as virtue ethics. According to Bowles and

colleagues, virtue is associated with character traits or personal qualities [124]. McIntyre summarised Aristotle's account of virtues as those qualities necessary to promote flourishing and wellbeing [129], while ethics and morality are often used interchangeably to describe and analyse thoughts and feelings about right and wrong acts and conditions [113].

In joining the two terms virtue and ethics, *virtue ethics* is not a matter of personal preference [113] but a pattern of action and feeling that should arise in response to the world [113]. In virtue ethics, it is argued that life is complex and it is better to focus on the character of the ethical actor rather than on principles, rules [130] or processes. Hugman incorporated affectivity (i.e. emotions) like joy, faith, hope and love into conversations about virtue ethics [131]. In Christianity, virtues like love for God, the world and others bring personal meaning and joy [113].

Virtue is referred to in the Bible, such as 2 Peter 1:5–7, which says, 'For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with

self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with [mutual] affection, and [mutual] affection with love' [132]. Additionally, in Colossians 3:12–14 it says to 'clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience… forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone… And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity' [5]. The Bible lists some of these attributes as the fruit of the spirit. These are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23) [5].

This study extended beyond individual character and reflected upon the essence and sociology of communities [131], in particular the quality of church engagements. All six churches appeared to strive towards being virtuous and displaying the fruit of the spirit. This significantly impacted their congregations and made them attractive to people living with disabilities and their family and friends. For example, one participant living with disabilities due to a health condition found the church to be encouraging, welcoming and kind. They informed their neighbour

living with disabilities, who also started attending church. They too found the church to be encouraging, welcoming and kind. They informed their relative living with disabilities about the church and he started coming to church.

All participants repeatedly commented on their churches' virtuous nature and/or display of the fruit of the spirit and the profound impact this had upon them. Some of the quotes below are listed under the segments/names of the fruit of the spirit and demonstrate the immense importance and attractiveness of being virtuous:

Love

Person 4: *This is the only church I have been to that makes you feel like you are wanted and makes you feel like you are part of their community.*

Joy

Person 18: *I am glad I come, it is one big family. [Name] makes my day, he makes me happy. I like coming.*

Peace

Person 6: *They are beautiful. They all help one another out. They shake hands with each other when giving peace. We sing songs… Everyone says good morning… Go for communion… have a cup of tea… best part… All about God.*

Patience

Person 4: *I was feeling really down. I had a lot of things piling on top of me. [Name of minister's wife] met me for coffee and she helped me. I know if I get into moods [name of minister's wife] is there to help me.*

Kindness

Person 7: *Church—it is a kindful (sic) place. You feel different. You feel loved by Jesus and it changes you once you go to church. You need to do the right thing for Jesus and God.*

Goodness

Person 7: *[Church] is good. It teaches you getting along things… Bible study will help people… if they decide to go. It cannot help you if you do*

not go to it… Same with church.

'Hands raised heavenwards in praise' by Jan Stead

Faithfulness

Person 2: *Exclusion… can be avoided… For example, I attend [a group] and I have to cross a busy road to get there. [Every week] people from the group meet me and help me cross the road—Very inclusive.*

Gentleness

Person 6: *They taught me how to knit. I knitted a jumper, pair of socks and a hat… I like the fact they are teaching me things … I am having trouble threading a needle. Because of my eye sight… They are beautiful. They all help one another out.*

'Goodness' by Jan Stead

Self-control

Person 11: *I am very proud of the people we have in our church. They are caring and inclusive. Everyone is treated for their gifts. Not looked as if there is something wrong with this person. None of that.*

These quotes describe the character of the six churches, which contrasts with intentional or unintentional thoughtlessness about the needs of people living with disabilities. The participants in this project easily recalled hurtful comments and exclusionary practices. For example:

Person 3: *There was a hurtful statement by a leader [from a different church in a different part of Australia]. They said it does not matter if you cannot read or hear it; this is what you are getting anyway.*

Unattractive actions and statements, such as this comment, resulted in disengagement.

Implications of Engaging

Belonging as a Christian within a Christian community is significant for a church and an individual Christian. It involves 'doing all possible for their neighbour's good, treating others as they would like to be treated by their neighbour, and working faithfully so that they share with those in need' [133]. The

'Belonging together' by Raymond Howes

six churches appeared to take seriously sharing God's abundant grace and their resources with others. They appeared not to be side-tracked by thorny debates about evangelism and the societal dimensions of mission[5] (that are outside the scope of this book). These churches were developing rural Christian communities in which all could belong with dignity throughout their lifespan and experiences. Participants indicated that, through teaching the gospel, their churches gave people living with disabilities the opportunity for hope, a Christian identity and a mission to invite others from within their personal networks into their Christian community. This strongly counteracted ideas that people who do not live with disabilities help or change 'the disabled' [135], or providing charity, pity or any negative implication. None of these actions result in true belonging. The following subsections expand upon these points.

5 Bosch skilfully and thoughtfully explained such debates in *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* [134].

Belonging Builds Up Everyone[6] [107]

Friendship, socialising, love and belonging were recurrent themes in the interviews. Existing in community brings dimensions of warmth, sharing [121] and belonging. Belonging is an appreciation of location in networks and neighbourhoods that sustain and create space for others to join [136].

Maslow highlighted the importance of belonging and argued that 'if both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness (sic) needs... Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart… or children.' (Maslow, 1943, para 34). Everyone needs to belong.

Belonging is greater than caring for someone living with a disability [137] and is greater than being included [138]. It involves sharing life in a relationship, creating trust, building a mutual identity and being in a community together.

6 Part of this subsection was originally printed in the article *Belonging: Social work, sociological and theological insights into engagements with people living with disabilities* by Monica Short in the 2017 Winter AASW NSW Branch Newsletter on disability, p. 29. The author is grateful to AASW NSW Branch for permission to reprint the information here.

Belonging arises from the feeling that one is missed if one is absent [22] and reflects a sense of reciprocity through which people exchange hospitality, including people living with disabilities [139]. In other words, 'belonging is a person-centred, dynamic and complex approach that understands people as active participants in society' [140].

Churches can misunderstand belonging and confuse it with ideas, such as welcoming or hosting people living with disabilities [138]. To belong to a church means someone is both the host and guest [138]. Churches can achieve this by being a friendly, hospitable and safe public space where people living with and without disabilities can share struggles and receive support [141].

The participants in this project stated that their rural churches were places of belonging that appeared not to segregate people. Rather, everyone interviewed was adopted into the full life of the church [141], and this was indicated in many of the statements by different participants, such as 'it's like a family', 'it's hard to say when the community stops and starts', 'never forgotten', 'you are wanted,

belong', '[friend] told me about her life and I tell her about mine'.

In particular, a visit to a church service that was held in a day centre attached to a residential and treatment facility highlighted the power of belonging that existed within these six churches. The pastoral care worker explained that the day-centre service was one of their church congregations/services. A number of the congregation members indicated they were unable to attend weekend church services due to health reasons and the pastoral care worker explained that the church conducted services at the centre because some people were unable to leave the facility.

Visit to a day-centre church service

> I, Monica, walked up a ramp into a health building and down a corridor. On one side of the corridor was a group room with people in it. In front of me was a nurse's station and to the right was another group room with more people. When I arrived, I introduced myself to the people who were early and found them

to be very friendly. I sat down next to a young adult called Joe (name changed and information anonymised). He smiled politely and then looked at the door; he was obviously waiting for someone. I noticed he was in a wheelchair and that he communicated nonverbally. He had the best smile and exceptional nonverbal communication skills. In walked someone. They went directly to Joe, picked up his hoody and put it on his head. Joe and the person both laughed and then the person said hello to everyone in the group. Joe, I observed, said hello to people nonverbally through his face. In came another, rushing to be there. They went straight to Joe, gave him a kiss and then greeted the others. Each time someone arrived, Joe received the first hello and he nonverbally replied. The church service started and Joe's face radiated happiness. They loudly sang songs as a community while Joe signed the words. During the church service, his smile grew larger and his eyes were twinkling. Eventually the service ended and I spoke with some of the people—including Joe—about the

> research project.[7] They all informed me that Joe inspired and encouraged them, they valued communicating with him, enjoyed his company and loved him. Everyone was thriving in this community through belonging.[8] [107]

Belonging allowed Joe and everyone in the group to transcend language, location and social constructs and implied that belonging connected Joe intimately with God and others. Belonging ensured dignity.

Dignity from Conception to Passing

Dignity is a concept common to social work, sociology and theology. For example, sociologists Ollerton and Horsfall highlighted the need for society to promote the dignity of people living with disabilities [142]. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* states

7 Joe, his support worker and members of the service assisted me with communicating with Joe.

8 Part of this subsection was originally printed in the article *Belonging: Social work, sociological and theological insights into engagements with people living with disabilities* by Monica Short in the 2017 Winter AASW NSW Branch Newsletter on disability, p. 29. The author is grateful to AASW NSW Branch for permission to reprint the information here.

that people living with disabilities have the right to inherent dignity [30, Article 3.1]. The Australian Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics* states that the profession 'respects the inherent dignity, worth and autonomy of every person' [93] and that social workers seek to preserve and promote human dignity and respect beliefs [93]. Theologians like Claassen also linked disability with dignity and respect [143]. Cameron explained theologically that Christians believe and respect every person because they are made in the image of God and each person is precious, regardless of their state of mind or their productivity [113]. Christian communities strive to practice care for each individual because they seek to reflect God's just, faithful and merciful character [113]. This dignity, respect and care for each person are reflected in Bible passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:22–23, which says, 'Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... we treat with special honour' [3]. Dignity is also referenced in public prayers, such as the Anglican Primate of Australia and Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne Philip Freier's thanks to God for creating all people in His image and prayer that the dignity of all

people would be celebrated in every way [144]. A Christian perception of dignity adds a dimension to the seriousness of life, for life is a gift from God requiring responsibility and gratitude [145].

'Celebrating the splendour of creation' by Jan Stead.

An implication of the Christian perception of dignity is that churches respect each person's relationship with God and honour people throughout their life stages independent of their ability, physical appearance, intellectual or sporting aptitude, wealth, health or progeny [143].

People, from early adulthood (also known as millennials or the second age of life) through to seniors (also known as the silent generation or the fourth age of life), participated in this research. The participants indicated that they had received respect and care

'Bible study' by Raymond Howes

from their church over many years and/or life stages, such as the following two comments:

Person 4: *They are very caring and look out for your best interests and they look out for one another.*

Person 9: *The values would be to treat everyone as Christ would. We are all children of God.*

The above quotes refer to a caring that appeared to exist because each of the churches held views that people living with disabilities and their Christian faith were indispensable before God.

Shared dignity also seemed to result in excitement. Clifton stated that in such circumstances, the

noise of disability is 'joy, laughter, encouragement and testimony to the goodness of God' [146]. Even when participants were experiencing tragedy or hardship, they delighted in their faith.

Interviewees were excited about their:

- Relationship with God through Jesus

Person 7: *It is very important. You get to know how Jesus died on the cross for us and how Jesus sacrificed himself for us.*

- Engagement with their church

Person 12: *I love it. I do not want to miss it.*

Person 13: *I love to come up here for church. I like [minister's name] and [pastoral carer's name]'s sermons. I like the friendliness… it makes us feel wonderful.*

Person 16: *It is alright coming to church. [Name] is here, [relative] is here, my family is here. There is never a dull moment. I am lucky to be here.*

Person 18: *It is a place where you laugh a lot.*

- Solace in their faith

Person 4: *I find solace. I need to go to church. It is like reassurance. Things are going to be ok. I can sit even before church starts… and talk to God.*

- Reading of the Bible

Person 4: *I wanted to learn… I am going to do a certificate in theology. I have not studied [at an educational institution] for a while and I need to get back into it. I love doing my homework for Bible study.*

Participants' faces lit up when talking about one or more of the above four topics. Some participants indicated that they had experienced tragedies, but because of their faith they had hope for their present regardless of their current hardships and future. For example, **Person 19** deeply grieved the loss of significant family members and stated:

Person 19: *It has been wonderful… He [God] has been with me all those years.*

For many participants, their faith and eternal hope grounded their reality and identity.

Experiencing God's Love and Comfort Can Give People Living with Disabilities Hope and Identity

Christian hope is an act of confidence focused on Jesus Christ [147]. Through belief in the resurrection of Jesus, a person receives forgiveness of sins, a

relationship with God and love [148]. The following quote indicates that participants attended church because they wished to nurture their Christian faith:

Person 10: *People go [to church] because they want to have a relationship with Jesus.*

This hope considers that the living God is not an illusion but a father and comforter for people [147]. For believers, this suggests that hope in God is revolutionary, transformational and powerful [147]. Many of the participants in this project testified to experiencing such a transformation as the following quote indicates:

Person 7: *I am good at Church… You feel loved by Jesus and it changes you.*

Love, comfort, hope and transformation encouraged people living with disabilities when they were experiencing trouble or worse:

Person 15: *We can pray for help for our troubles. As we all have trouble in our families. I get great comfort. It encourages everyone. I enjoy it.*

Person 18: *I lost… faith in church and God ... I am finding my way back... I think when I lost my mother and brother and I blamed God and told Him where to go. Now I am getting over it ... I*

really did blame God. [I now realise] there is only one God and He is here.

Person 19: *He [my husband] was cared for by God. God has looked after us [as my husband was unwell and dying]. I live in a retirement village now… I am sure God is still caring for me today.*

Another implication of God's love and comfort is when a person becomes a Christian they receive a new identity [113]. According to the participants, this occurred in reciprocity through *God knowing them* and *developing a Christian identity*.

Regarding *God knowing the person*, people living with disabilities and their carers can have multiple identities, including medical and social labels. Christians believe that God created us and sustains and knows us [22] and that our identity is safe in His memory [22]. In other words, Christians believe that God knows people by name and not their condition or label and by their gifts and not only their impairment or caring role. This can be cathartic.

With regards to *developing a Christian identity*, this can also contribute to and build a person's identity [149] as evidenced by the following quotes:

Person 19: *I find all I need here in God's presence… My life is completely in God's hands.*

Person 10: *I feel good going to [name of Church service]—I feel accepted… [Group name helps us] grow into who we are meant to be.*

Love is at the core of a Christian's identity [113] and involves people trusting in and displaying Jesus' directives on love [113]. For example, John 13:35 states that 'everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another'. Joel's story demonstrates these points about identity.

Joel's testimony

> Joel (name changed and information anonymised) receives the disability support pension. As a child, he went to a school that specialised in teaching children living with disabilities because he could not read or write and often had falls. Joel left school in Year 11 Joel regularly attends two Bible studies and two

church services. He appreciates the opportunity to learn about God and thinks it is important to understand the Bible. Joel explained that the Bible study leaders help him when he is confused or cannot read something.

Joel described church as a kind place that welcomes all people. He explained that when he became a Christian he felt different and loved. Joel reported that since becoming a Christian he has changed as a person. For example, now he tries to do the right thing for Jesus and God. Joel has developed a new identity and has hope for his future. He explained that the Bible and church have taught him how to interact with people and how to navigate the difficulties in his life. Church assisted him in understanding how relationships work.

Joel was keen to help others to form a relationship with Jesus and become a Christian. He enjoys being a helper at Kids' Club and hopes the children will grow strong and know that God is there when they need help. Joel also desired everyone to know that God can guide him or her through his or her life.

Joel is proud of being a Christian and enjoyed narrating his life story and wished to introduce others to Jesus. MacKinlay argued that someone's story is one of the greatest gifts they have to share because their story is part of their identity and an expression of their being [3]. It was an honour to hear Joel's and the other participants' stories, hopes, goals and mission.

'The Cross' by Jan Stead

Mission—Reaching a Community through an Individual's Networks

For some authors, mission can refer to the entire scope of God's activity to redeem and restore creation. For example, Bosch argued that the entire Christian existence should be characterised as a missionary existence [134]. According to this

approach, Christian activities are missional, including acts of justice. This research project does not deny that the activities of God's people that arise out of their faith in Christ have immeasurable mission significance. However, other writers, like DeYoung and Gilbert, defined mission primarily in terms of the verbal proclamation of the gospel message and discipleship [150].

With full respect for all activities associated with godly living and discouraging silos within ministry and Christian living, this subsection focuses on evangelism as an aspect of mission. The participants in this research project appeared to live out the teaching and example of the great commission, the early church in Acts and the life of the apostle Paul by proclaiming the gospel [150]. This is shown in the quote below:

Person 15: *I think once they find the Lord they will be a lot better. As long as I can I will preach it to them that they must find the Lord.*

Brain considered people, such as Person 15, to be disciples of Jesus that are witnesses to the world about Him [151]. As Edwards stated, people are also in the 'disciple-making business', making disciples

'Jesus—the way' by Raymond Howes.

for of all without distinction [152]. A number of participants/disciples continually equipped themselves for this mission, as indicated by the following quote:

Person 4: *I am one of the Scripture teachers in the high school… teaching kids with special needs [about God]. I am wanting to learn theology so I can be a better teacher to the kids.*

Most theological understandings of mission, including those focusing on evangelism, consider that Christian mission starts with God. God's mission is to redeem sinners who seek His salvation [111].

This salvation arises from humankind's history, fall and redemption of creation [111].

Most approaches also accept that Christian mission works to benefit everyone and their communities. The following quote from the research highlights this point:

Person 20: *Church needs to be authentic for all… It is important to give people ownership of the church. All are intertwined.*

Additionally, through their parishioners, rural Anglican churches have extensive networks because many congregation members have multiple roles within their towns. Cheers highlighted this interconnection in rural communities [153] For example, in non-urban locations, the church musician living with disabilities is also visibly the personal shopper, social worker and town soccer coach. Such interconnections mean local people have local knowledge of their rural community based on their lived experience, personally understand their community's needs and problems [123] and can create meaningful and positive change.

The six rurally located churches that are the focus of this project are part of their towns that are small compared to cities like Canberra. Rural town residents and large city residents connect differently with each other. For example, those in country towns are often aware of other residents' lives, such as knowing who is a Christian. Participants highlighted their interconnectedness with others in their local rural communities. Some of the people interviewed had contact with services and/or had assistance with home-based activities. All had contact with neighbours, friends and/or family. When asked by other town residents about their week, some participants enjoyed informing people about their church and faith. Some participants explained that their interrelationships provided them with opportunities to share with others their engagement with their local church, what it felt like to belong in a Christian community and their faith. It allowed them to love their neighbours/others and pass on the message of God that is summarised in Christ [151].

Limitations

This case study was directed by the stories and perspectives of people living with disabilities, including the themes presented in the preceding subsections. There are some limitations to this methodology. First, the sample size is small. Consequently, the sample size does not represent the full spectrum of thinking about how the Anglican Church of Australia engages with people living with disabilities. Second, the integrated lens scaffolding the research is limited to the three disciplines of social work, sociology and theology at the exclusion of others. Third, the research focuses on peoples' subjective experiences and strengths of engagement. Therefore, the research tends towards positive stories about the church and does not address disengagement. Fourth, the researcher is a member of the Anglican Church of Australia and a Christian and this may have influenced what was shared by participants (though it may also have helped people feel comfortable and willing to share their stories).

Conclusion

The Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn contains vibrant, rurally located faith-based communities. Twenty people from six rural Anglican churches from this Diocese, 16 of whom live with disabilities, bravely voiced their stories about their faith, engagement with their rural Anglican churches and sense of belonging. They outlined their perceptions about how the Anglican Church of Australia engages with people living with disabilities in rural, regional and remote communities and discussed the intentions, impacts and implications of these engagements. The participants explained that their churches established communities of faith that aimed to engage with and pastorally care for everyone. They also described how their churches' engagements had a positive impact upon them and their local communities. Through the 20 participants' narratives about engagement, it was discovered how to intentionally nurture socially inclusive Christian communities of belonging that are socially just for all and help to minimise rural and social isolation. These 20 testimonies invite us

to expand the conversation about how to respect people living with disabilities, build social capital, foster peaceful social integration and develop missional communities that can respectfully share with others God's love and the Christian gospel in rural Australia. They remind everyone that the implications of positive engagement include to know and have dignity, hope, belongingness and a mission. After all, every rural Anglican church has or can develop the potential to both embrace people living with disabilities in rural communities and beyond and celebrate peoples' relationships with others and God independent of ability, health or age.

Recommendations

These recommendations come directly from informants and participants. For some, they may appear obvious and thence achievable, while for others the recommendations may mean significant change. If so, the recommendations may have the potential to assist churches with their engagement

with people living with disabilities and the associated impacts and implications.

Training

1. It is recommended that church members be encouraged to attend training programs, such as mental health first aid training, disability awareness training or disability support groups.
2. It is suggested that when planning activities and programs, leadership teams invite advice from people living with disabilities and professionals, such as occupational therapists, social workers and disability support groups, about strategies for inclusion and access for people living with disabilities.

Connect with community-based disability networks

3. It is suggested that rural Anglican churches identify and connect with disability services, support groups and networks in their local towns and consider mutually beneficial ways to complement and build up existing services.

4. It is recommended that rural Anglican churches aim to provide accessible pastoral care for all regardless of distance.

Analyse demography and pray accordingly

5. It is recommended parish councils intentionally pray about and reflect on the demography of their rural towns, including the population trends and needs concerning people living with disabilities. It is suggested that these prayers and reflections include identifying entry points into disability networks, support groups and services.

Diversify leadership teams

6. It is recommended that in partnership with people living with disabilities, rural churches intentionally establish a five-year vision that aims to identify, train and integrate Christians and/or others living with disabilities into all leadership teams and church activities.

Set a vision for engaging with people living with disabilities

7. It is suggested that parish councils intentionally invite people living with disabilities and their friends and family to rural Anglican church services and activities. For example, this may include inviting families receiving services from accessible education providers to church. These invitations include assistance with accessing church services, activities and pastoral care.
8. Identify venues for regular accessible church activities, such as nursing homes, group homes, community centres and retirement villages.
9. It is recommended that rural Anglican churches audit their environment and consider what effect dominant structures and attitudes have on people living with disabilities attending church services and activities. For example, do the path, entrance and welcoming system invite entry and welcome or does it portray exclusion. It is also recommended that churches try to be pre-emptive and strategic when introducing structural and attitudinal changes and not wait

until someone living with disabilities tries to attend and experiences a barrier.

Have a long-term view

10. Churches aim to be counter-cultural and assume all people living with disabilities, regardless of diagnosis, can learn throughout their lives. Churches aim to ensure that people living with disabilities who wish to learn about God have the opportunities and supports to partake in ongoing Bible studies, evangelism programs, theological studies, pastoral care training and other similar activities.
11. It is recommended that people living with disabilities have opportunities to regularly contribute to church activities and rosters and minister to others in the congregation.
12. It is recommended that future research be conducted about church engagements, such as that outlined in this publication's essay by Dr Louise Gosbell.
13. Let everyone celebrate all people and their faith and share with others stories about

engagements between the Anglican Church and people living with disabilities.

Postscript

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia, Charles Sturt University and CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program supported this project. Dr Louise Gosbell from CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program kindly provided an essay, *The experiences of people living with disability in three urban Anglican churches*, located towards the back of this book. This essay complements this research project by thoughtfully sharing stories about people living with disabilities who attend urban churches in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The essay also introduces her exciting research project into the field.

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Essay:
The Experiences of People Living with Disabilities in Three Urban Anglican Churches

By Dr Louise Gosbell

This short essay describes the experiences of three urban Anglican churches in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the way in which those churches are engaging with people living with disabilities. Utilising the same methodologies and interview questions and techniques used throughout Monica's book, this self-enclosed essay seeks to open a dialogue regarding the way people with disabilities are engaging within urban Anglican churches. First, this essay will outline the methodology utilised followed by an explanation on the need for social research into the experiences of people with disabilities in church communities, and second, introduce the three urban Anglican churches that participated in the current study. Last, the essay will outline the ways in which these three

churches are demonstrating an active engagement with people living with disabilities in their parishes.

Methodology

Similar to the rural churches project, information was gathered from urban churches through semi-structured interviews with all data anonymised. Dr Louise Gosbell interviewed 14 parish members from three urban churches through face-to-face interviews. People interviewed for the urban component of this study ranged in age from early twenties through to late eighties and comprised of four males and 10 females. Seven of the 14 people interviewed identified themselves as 'needing assistance in one or more of the three core activity areas—mobility and communication because of a long-term health condition (lasting six months or more), a disability (lasting six months or more) or old age—of self-care [1]. In addition, seven participants described themselves as carers or persons of assistance to others with a long-term illness or disability. In some cases, people interviewed were both limited in their own ability to complete core

activities but simultaneously caring for others who were also limited through chronic illness and/or disability. In addition, four participants also described themselves as being employed or volunteering within the disability sector or in a disability-related role in the community. Similar to the interviews conducted in the rural churches, all participants identified as active members of the Anglican Church, some in positions of formal or informal leadership.

Experiences of People Living with Disabilities in Urban Australia

The global shift from rural to urban living has been recognised as a significant global transition. In fact, 2007 marked the first year in which most of the global population resided in urban rather than rural settings [2]. While urbanity offers increased access to education, health services, technology and social services, the effect of increasing urbanisation is not without its complications. Studies showed that decreased access to the natural environment has a detrimental effect on general health and wellbeing

[2]. Indeed, in their report on the social determinants of health, the World Health Organization reported that increasing global urbanisation is 'reshaping population health problems', in particular it is drastically increasing the likelihood of people developing a range of mental health conditions [2].

Australia is not immune from these trends. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in 2011 'Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with over two thirds (69 per cent) of the population living in major cities' [3]. For this reason, it is important to consider not only the experiences of people living with disabilities in rural and regional Australia but also those residing in urban areas.

The ABS reported that in 2011, just under one in five Australians (18.5 per cent of the national population) lived with some form of disability [4] and 87 per cent of these people had an impairment that restricted 'their ability to perform communication, mobility or self-care activities, or a restriction associated with schooling or employment' [4]. In addition, almost 2.7 million Australians (11.6 per cent) reported as being carers to a person with

a disability, with over one-third of primary carers (37.8 per cent) living with some form of disability themselves [4]. With an ageing population in Australia, the phenomenon of age-related disability also becomes increasingly important. According to the ABS, in 2009 3.4 per cent of Australians aged four and under were classified as experiencing a disability compared with 40 per cent of people aged 64–69 years and 88 per cent of those aged 90 years and over [4]. Such statistics support the claims of the World Health Organization that increasing medical advancements have only served to increase rather than decrease the number of people living with disabilities globally [5].

Although it is apparent that the proportion of people with disabilities residing in rural and remote Australia is higher than those in urban areas, there remains 17 per cent of the national population in major cities living with some form of disability, a statistic that is high enough to warrant enquiry about the experiences of such a demographic [4]. While the challenges of accessing medical services, transportation, communication, education and so on are certainly more significant in rural areas, the

experiences of people with disabilities as being 'present in our community, but… [not] actually part of it' is common across Australia [6]. In submissions to the Australian Government in preparation for the parliamentary enquiry on the experiences of people with disabilities, it was acknowledged that:

> *A lack of social inclusion and the multiple barriers to meaningful participation in the community faced by people with disabilities were the most frequently raised issues in the submissions and consultations. People with disabilities and their families, friends and carers reported daily instances of being segregated, excluded, marginalised and ignored. At best, they reported being treated as different. At worst they reported experiencing exclusion and abuse, and being the subject of fear, ignorance and prejudice [6].*

Given that this is the case across Australia, it is incredibly important to document the instances of churches who are actively seeking to engage with people living with disabilities in the church community. The stories in this essay focus not on the exclusion and barriers that are so often experienced by

people with disabilities across Australia, but on stories of inclusion, welcome and belonging. These are stories in which the label of 'disability' is put aside in favour of a shared humanity and acknowledgement that limitation is not solely restricted to those living with disabilities but is common to us all.

According to data collected during the 2009 National Church Life Survey (NCLS), only 10 per cent of people in the Anglican church in Australia identify as having a disability; though using a different measure, this statistic appears substantially less than the 2009 ABS national statistic of 18.5 per cent [7, 4]. For this reason, identifying churches in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra Goulburn that are actively engaging with people with disabilities is vital in providing effective models for disability inclusion. It is our hope that these stories will assist with guiding other church communities to develop similar practices of welcome and inclusion for people with disabilities to address the deficit between the national percentage of people with disabilities and the NCLS statistic on people with disabilities in The Anglican Church.

This part of the essay focuses on research gathered from three urban churches in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

The Urban Churches

St Paul's Manuka, Parish of Manuka, Region of South Canberra

St Paul's Manuka is located within the central district of South Canberra. According to the 2011 ABS census data, the district was home to 24,154 residents, 1.5 per cent of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [8]. While there has been some disputation regarding the identity of the original custodians of the land in the Canberra region, in general the region of South Canberra is considered part of the territory of the Ngunnawal people [9].

While the region now known as Canberra was inhabited by the Ngunnawal people for 20,000 years and was 'settled' in 1824 by Europeans, the planning for the city of Canberra only began after the Federation of Australia on 1 January 1901.

St Paul's Anglican Church Manuka. Photograph provided by St Paul's. Photo ©Christina Erwin, used with permission

The suburbs covered by the Anglican Parish of Manuka—Narrabundah, Kingston, Griffith, and Red Hill—were established around 1928 and the major streets of these suburbs were included as part of Burley Griffin's original design for Canberra.

The ABS estimated that in 2014, the percentage of the Canberra population with disabilities was 15.1 per cent for Kingston–Barton [10], 16.2 per cent for Red Hill [11], 15.4 per cent for Narrabundah [12] and 13.7 per cent for Griffith [13]. In addition, 10.8 per cent of people in the South Canberra region ticked yes to 'providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family, others' in the 2011 census [14]. The census data also showed that 16.9 per

cent of people in South Canberra identified as Anglicans [14].

St Paul's was founded in 1939 and is described in the Australian Capital Territory Heritage Register as an 'excellent example of an Inter-War Gothic church with Art Deco influences' [15]. St Paul's was 'the first Anglican Church to be built following the foundation of the National Capital and was the first Anglican Parish in South Canberra' [15]. On 21 October 2016, the Bishop-in-council decided to broaden the Parish of Manuka to include the suburb of Forrest. According to the Statement of Heritage Significance, the church had a prominent position in the capital during the Second World War, as it 'served as a icon (sic) of hope, being the venue for intercessory prayer services' [15]. In 2011, the church received heritage status as a result of its inter-war architecture, aesthetic landscaping and prominent role in the early development of the capital [15].

St Paul's Manuka 'is grounded in the rich tradition of Anglicanism' [16], holding 'great reverence for Scripture and the sacraments of the Church and maintain[ing] fine liturgical traditions

and excellence in music' [16]. St Paul's has three regular Sunday services and a monthly Choral Evensong between February and November [16]. The church is known for its eight bells that were installed in June 2003 and are rung on Sunday mornings and for weddings, funerals and special occasions. The band of bellringers at St Paul's consists of 15 members [16]. St Paul's is also known for its choir and proficient musicianship under the guidance of St Paul's Director of Music, Matthew Stuckings [16].

St Paul's hosts numerous community activities, such as an Education for Ministry program, op shop and social walking group. It supports a 'JustWater' project and has a refugee support team that fundraises and provides support for refugees in Canberra. In addition, St Paul's plays a significant role, along with the Canberra Baptist Church and Wesley Uniting Church, in a community centre called The Verandah at Stuart Flats in Griffith. The Verandah is considered 'one of the most significant outreach projects' of the parish and provides 'hospitality and welfare' to the local community three times a week [16]. People with disabilities

are a vital part of the community at St Paul's and contribute to a range of ministry opportunities.

St Paul's Ginninderra, Parish of Ginninderra, Region of Belconnen

St Paul's Ginninderra is located within the central district of Canberra known as Belconnen. Belconnen was one of the 18 districts outlined in the original design for the city of Canberra. Belconnen is situated to the north-west of the central business district of Canberra, adjacent to the artificial Lake Ginninderra. The suburbs covered by the Anglican Parish of Ginninderra—Melba, Evatt, Spence and McKellar—were gazetted between 1972 and 1974. This was despite the region being previously occupied by the Ngunnawal people, and the land, then referred to as Ginninderra, subsequently used for agricultural purposes from 1826 and other purposes, including a school, general store, post office and telegraph service.

According to the 2011 census, Belconnen boasted a population of 92,444, making it the most populous district within the Australian Capital

St Paul's Anglican Church Ginninderra. Photograph provided by St Paul's

Territory [17]. Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders comprised 1.3 per cent of Belconnen's population in the 2011 census [17]. The ABS estimated that in 2014, the percentage of the population with disabilities was 17.9 per cent for Spence [18], 14.2 per cent for Melba [19], 17.8 per cent for McKellar [20] and 17 per cent for Evatt [21]. In addition, 11.1 per cent of people in the Belconnen region ticked yes to 'providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family, others' in the 2011 census [22]. The census

data also showed that 14.3 per cent of people in the district of Belconnen identified as Anglicans [23].

In its original form, St Paul's Ginninderra was built in 1861 and functioned until 1902. In 1916, the property was purchased by the Commonwealth and was leased as farmland with the original church used as a stable [24]. In 1973, St Paul's Ginninderra was re-established to serve the suburbs of Melba, Evatt, Spence and McKellar [24]. The church currently meets in what was the Spence Primary School and is now the Mount Rogers Community Centre [24].

In 2007, the church began the Helping Hand Food Pantry. This service supports 49 families a week with about 18 tons of low-cost food per year and provides over 2000 meals per year by donation to the church's café, the Community Coffee Corner, 'activities [that] provide significant opportunities for mission, evangelism, and transformation but in a challenging environment' [24].

St Stephens Kambah, Parish of Kambah, Region of Tuggeranong

St Stephen's Anglican Church Kambah. Photograph provided by St Stephen's

St Stephen's Kambah is located within the Canberra district of Tuggeranong. The suburb of Kambah covers an area of 1130 ha and is the largest suburb in the city of Canberra. It was the first suburb to open in the district of Tuggeranong in 1974. Similar to the two previous districts of Canberra, the Ngunnawal people are currently recognised as the original custodians of the Tuggeranong district, although this title is contested by the Ngambri people from which the name Kambah is believed to be derived [25]. The district of Tuggeranong has a population of 86,900 [26], 2.1 per cent of whom consist of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders [27].

The ABS estimated that in 2014, the percentage of the population living with disabilities was 17 per cent for Kambah [28] and 16 per cent for Greenway [29]. As well the Belconnen region, 11.1 per cent of people in the Tuggeranong region ticked yes to 'providing unpaid care, help or assistance to family, others' in the 2011 census [30]. The census data also showed that 17.1 per cent of people in the Tuggeranong district identified as Anglican [30].

The Parish of Kambah is located within Canberra's Tuggeranong Valley. After years of meeting in local schools and homes, the parish settled in its own facility in the mid-1980s. Named after St Stephen, the parish's congregations seek to serve the local community through pastoral engagement and care while presenting a vibrant vision of God's Kingdom. Lay ministry is valued because the church believes that God has created all people with capacity to love and serve. St Stephen's currently meets twice on a Sunday and is re-establishing children's and youth ministries. It has a long-established prayer team and continues to work in a local primary school to provide mentoring to children who are at risk. People living with a range

of disabilities worship and minister at St Stephen's in both formal and informal capacities [31].

Engagement with People Living with Disabilities

Person K: *They look after me here [at church] wonderfully… everyone here looks after me.*
Person D: *This is a very loving community.*

Similar to the results from the rural churches research project, each of the participants interviewed from the urban churches expressed a strong sense of belonging within their church communities. In each instance, the participants saw their church communities as places where people, irrespective of physical or intellectual ability or disability, felt connected and at home. In this sense, each of these communities served as a corporeal representation of Paul's metaphor of the church as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians. 12:12–31). Here, the apostle Paul speaks of the Body of Christ as a place of diversity where each member plays a different role but use their individual gifts and abilities to work together for the good of the whole body—the church. Paul recognises that while some

members have more obvious and perhaps more desirable roles, God 'has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be' (1 Corinthians. 12:18). Paul even suggests that the members of the body who might seem 'weaker' are actually 'indispensable' (1 Corinthians. 12:22) for the effective functioning of the Body of Christ. Each of the participants interviewed from the urban churches believed that they were not simply present in their churches. They believed that each held a significant and valued place within their church community in the way Paul describes the diversity of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12.

Many of the participants from the urban churches described their role in the church as extending beyond attendance at Sunday services. Many described participation in weekly Bible study groups, involvement in pastoral care in a formal or informal capacity. Many sought to offer hospitality to people both within and outside of their direct church communities as well as participation in many other ministries of their church communities. This participation was not limited to people living with disabilities being the passive recipients of ministry.

The majority of those interviewed in the urban churches understood themselves to be using their gifts to contribute to the life and ministry of their churches. The participants expressed the belief that they were not simply present but were actively and gratefully engaged within the various ministries of their churches as both contributors and recipients of a range of services and ministries.

In addition to participation in church activities, many participants from the urban churches also felt that their church communities had actively sought out the participants to discuss ways in which the church could be more accessible and accommodating towards the participants in light of their particular disabilities. As will be described in more detail below, many of the participants described a range of changes that each of the churches implemented to make church more accessible for the participants. These changes included modifications to the physical environment, such as access to church buildings, toilets and parking and changes to forms of communication within services and beyond, such as offering large-print prayer books and orders of service,

increasing font sizes on PowerPoint presentations and emailing sermon notes. In this respect, many of the participants felt that the churches had acted to ensure the voices of people with disabilities were heard on issues of accessibility. This view is significant especially given that one of the long-standing views of the secular disability movement is the belief that decisions are made about people with disabilities rather than with them [32]. For this reason, advocates for the disability movement adopted the slogan 'nothing about us without us' [33] to express the belief that people with disabilities should be consulted on decisions that would directly affect them. In seeking out the voices of people with disabilities within their communities, each of the churches showed a sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities and that the unique opinions and experiences of people with disabilities were valued. These opinions might be different to the opinions and experiences of the able-bodied members of the various church communities.

In the interviews with urban church participants, one of the most commonly expressed theological tenets was that all people are created in the image

of God and, thus, valued, loved and accepted by God (Genesis 1:27). While theologians have debated whether this 'image' relates to humanity's dominion over creation, creative ability, rational capacity or a range of other possibilities, the interpretation of this 'image' by the participants was not so theologically interrogated. Yet, it was viewed as one of the primary motivations for making churches accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. That is, we are all created in God's image, including people with disabilities and because of this people act with loving kindness to each other in the same way that God shows loving kindness to us. The belief that all of humanity are God's image bearers and, thus, valuable to God was a primary motivation behind each church's desire to be places of welcome and belonging for people with disabilities.

The following subsections aim to draw out some of the common themes addressed by the participants from the three urban churches.

Observations: Intentions, Impacts and Implications

Intentional Engagements

Person D: *I just feel part of it [the church]. I just love it… I feel supported, but it is more than that. I don't have a particularly attentive family, and so the church fills the place that a family should have for me, and they do that more than adequately really. They are my family.*

In all three of the urban churches that participated in the study, the participants expressed the belief that their church was actively working to include members living with disabilities. Participants described a wide range of opportunities that were open to them to participate, such as contributing to Sunday services through welcoming. Many participants belonged to a Bible study group that was held in someone's home or on the grounds of the church, while others were on their church roster for serving morning tea, cooking meals for others in need in the church and cleaning up after services. Many of the interviewees were also involved in

formal or informal leadership roles within their churches, such as overseeing liturgy, pastoral care and supervision of children. In addition, participants described their churches as proactively working to limit existing barriers to inclusion, in particular with respect to physical access to church buildings as well as modes of communication.

These representations of churches intentionally engaging with their members with disabilities are significant for several reasons. First, it upholds the value and dignity of each of the members with disabilities, emphasising that each one is an important and valued member of their church community. Second, it serves as a contrast to the experiences of many people with disabilities in the broader Australian society who, according to a 2009 Australian Government enquiry into the experiences of people with disabilities, 'find themselves socially, culturally and politically isolated' [8]. Rather than being overlooked and forgotten as was the experience of many people interviewed for the 2009 *Shut out: The experience of people with disabilities and their families in Australia* report, the participants interviewed for the current study

considered themselves valued and contributing members of their church communities known by parishioners and the church's leadership. Most of the participants interviewed shared how their churches sought to learn and understand the limitations they experienced because of their disability and how the churches could improve the accessibility, both physically and attitudinally, to ensure full engagement within Sunday services and broader church life. Many of the participants also reflected on their own strengths and gifts, which they felt gave an insight into life from a different perspective than those experiencing life as able-bodied members of their church communities. This reflection expanded the churches' collective knowledge about inclusion for people with a range of different disabilities and/or people who might be at risk of being marginalised in society for reasons other than disability such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Intentionally Establishing Inclusive Communities of Faith and Connection

Person F: *To include people really isn't that difficult.*

John Swinton is a Scottish theologian who has published widely in the field of Christian disability studies and has written extensively on what practical theology looks like when churches intentionally engage with people living with disabilities. In his work *The Body of Christ has Down's Syndrome: Theological reflections on vulnerability, disability, and graceful communities*, Swinton reflected on the L'Arche communities that are 'an international network of inclusive communities within which people with developmental disabilities live together with people who do not have such disabilities' [34]. Swinton reflected that 'at the heart of L'Arche lies the act of welcoming and accepting' [34], which occurs through welcoming 'all people as gifts which have divine dignity, meaning, and purpose. A gift is something to be received with thankfulness and love for what it is, not for what it might become or for what it is not' [34]. For Swinton, true

inclusion and belonging occurs when all people in Christian communities, including people living with disabilities, are accepted as gifts to the church rather than as burdens or disruptions to regular church practice.

The language of belonging and inclusion was repeated often in the interviews with the participants from the urban churches. Many participants described their experiences of church as representing the kind of inclusive and accepting Christian communities that were referred to by Swinton. This inclusion was enacted in a range of different ways across the three churches. For example, **Person D** stated that she felt included when she observed her church help people with disabilities identify and utilise their God-given gifts and passions in service to the church community, and described her experience of being approached by her minister and asked in what ways she might like to serve the church community:

Person D: *He asked me what I might like to do at church… but if I wasn't able to do something, then there was no problem in finding a different way that I could help out.*

Through being asked about her gifts and by being actively encouraged to participate and contribute to the life of the church, **Person D** saw herself as an important and valuable part of the church community, which continues to be reinforced through her leadership in a range of capacities within her church community.

Other participants from the urban churches described feeling included when arrangements were made for them to travel to church with other parishioners when they were no longer able to drive themselves to Sunday services or other church events. Some participants felt included when their illness or disability prevented them from attending church for long periods of time but they were still contacted regularly by the minister and fellow parishioners. One participant, **Person J**, noted that while the church was good at rallying around people to support them short-term, the church did not always know how to support people longer term. However, **Person J** described her experiences of her church community as '*overwhelmingly positive*', especially during times that were particularly challenging for her in her role as carer to her spouse.

At the core of the stories gathered from the urban church participants was the importance of relationships with other members of their church communities. Numerous participants described themselves as more equipped to face challenges and better able to cope with life's stresses because of their genuine friendships with other members of their church communities. For example, **Person K** stated that '*everyone needs to have friends, including people living with disabilities*'. Such an observation is both incredibly simple yet theologically profound. In their work on the experiences of people living with disabilities in Australian churches, Lindsay Gale and Jason Forbes suggested that friendship between people with and without disability is valuable for people living with disabilities and 'vital to the relational well-being of Church congregations' [9]. Genuine friendships with other members of the church community in which people journey together to traverse life's challenges serve as the practical outworking of God's love and acceptance. It is in the context of such genuine relationships in which people are valued for who they truly are that true inclusion takes place.

Intentionally Overcoming Physical Barriers to Inclusion

Person F: *Even when I have been unwell… been in a wheelchair, sometimes crutches, people [in the church] have just adapted to what I needed. If people see I need assistance to open the door, then someone will open it for me. If I wanted to go up for communion when I wasn't as mobile, they would let me come up to receive communion; there was no 'ifs or buts' about it, I was able to come up for communion.*

It was noted in the rural study sections of this publication that the rural churches that participated in the current research were limited in their ability to make modifications to their church buildings and grounds because of limited budgets and/or restrictions imposed on heritage-listed properties. In contrast, two of the three churches that participated in the urban component of this study made significant adjustments to the physical accessibility of their churches, such as the building of ramps and levelling of entrance points. However, the third church rents a government-owned building, which

means they are unable to make any structural changes to the existing buildings. Despite this, the access to the hall used by the church is level, making access to the main building straightforward for people living with disabilities or age-related mobility restrictions.

According to data collected by the 2009 NCLS, 75 per cent of people surveyed considered their churches to be doing well in terms of making amendments to their major physical facilities, such as the addition of ramps and accessible parking and toilets [9]. This statistic was certainly replicated in the data collected from participants from the urban churches, who indicated that any modifications required to church buildings were not viewed as an imposition. Rather, they were readily addressed by church leadership to ensure access for members of the churches with restricted mobility due to disability, illness or ageing. For example, one participant recalled that:

Person A: *We tried for a little while to use a different entrance to the church, but they quickly found it wasn't suitable for a lot of older people in the church so they changed it back*

again. The way the entrance is now is flat and people with wheelchairs, walkers [and] prams can get in easily.

However, physical access to churches is not simply about access to the church buildings or toilets but also includes other physical features of a church's facilities. For example, it includes the instalment of hearing loops for people who are hearing impaired, the provision of large-print materials for people who are vision impaired and alternative seating arrangements for people who are wheelchair users or mobility impaired. Physical access also addresses movement from one part of a church building to another, such as parishioners who move from the seated area of a church to the front to receive communion. Physical access considers when parishioners may need to move from the church to a hall or other separate building for children's ministry, morning tea or Bible study groups.

According to the 2009 NCLS results, only 55.5 per cent of people surveyed considered their churches well-equipped with respect to the 'minor physical facilities' of their churches, a proportion that is 20 per cent lower than the percentage of

people who considered their churches to have good access to 'major physical facilities' [7]. Many of the participants from the urban churches referred to modifications made to the physical structure of their church buildings and the amendments made to the internal topography of their churches. Some participants made mention of their church's provision of large-print materials, such as prayer books and sermon outlines. Other participants mentioned the range of seating alternatives available to parishioners, for example the provision of spaces to accommodate people who are wheelchair users or the provision of chairs with armrests for people who lack stability or require assistance to move from a sitting to standing position. In addition, **Person F** noted that her church had made modifications to the lighting in their church building to accommodate people with low vision and minimise the risk of seizures for people with epilepsy. Each of the participants who mentioned modifications being made to their church buildings referred to the changes being made willingly. For example, **Person D** stated that her

church was 'happy to run things off in larger print because they know I can't read them otherwise'.

Some participants suggested that while modifications to buildings could be costly, there were numerous small accommodations churches could make to help people living with disabilities feel more comfortable in their church community. **Person B** indicated that '*small changes can make a big difference*' to a person living with disabilities. She suggested that a small portable ramp could be used for buildings with single steps 'to make things easier for a person in a wheelchair or with a walking frame'. Numerous participants also referred to the fact that printed material in large-print format, such as church bulletins and sermon outlines, were inexpensive to make available. Although **Person H** acknowledged that purchasing large quantities of large-print Bible and prayer books was a considerable expense, churches could '*be creative*' in reproducing material in a way that was helpful for people with low vision. **Person H** also stated that while utilising PowerPoint presentations for hymns or sermon aides carried its own complications for people with vision impairment, it was 'fairly easy'

to find fonts and font sizes that were suitable for accommodating people with low vision [35, 36, 37].

Intentionally Overcoming Non-physical Barriers to Inclusion

While physical barriers are often obvious examples of inaccessibility for people living with disabilities, not all barriers are easily identified or modified. As noted above, the 2009 NCLS results found that 75 per cent of participants considered their churches to be doing well in terms of church physical facility amendments (e.g. ramps, parking spaces and toilets) and 55.5 per cent suggested that their churches were performing well with minor physical facilities (e.g. hearing loops, large-print alternatives and alternative seating arrangements). However, the survey results also indicated that churches were making far less progress in relation to 'adapting programmes to needs and achieving an active culture of inclusion' [7]. In this respect, Gale and Forbes contended that 'a church's physical accessibility, while important, does not commit it to reaching out to people in the community, and

the presence of ramps and toilets, or even hearing loops and seating alternatives, do not distinguish disability-engaged churches from those with no such connection' [7]. In other words, even though a church might have physical access to all buildings and accessible parking and toilets, this physical access did not automatically equate to a welcoming environment for people living with disabilities.

In addition to physical access, there are other factors influencing a person's ability to feel accepted by a church community. **Person C**, a carer to a person living with disabilities, suggested that a parishioner with slow or slurred speech could find church difficult unless church members were willing to be patient and listen attentively as they spoke. **Person B** spoke of her experiences as a carer to a person with a disability who occasionally exhibited difficult behaviours, such as yelling at people or becoming physically aggressive. She noted that in her current church, people were gracious and willing to overlook these difficult behaviours, which was not the case with previously attended churches. Similarly, **Person F** stated that while her current church was '*very inclusive of people with disability*',

she had previously belonged to other churches that were not so understanding and accommodating of her disabilities. She noted that at one previous church she had attended in a different Diocese, a priest informed her that he refused to allow her to partake in communion because of her disabilities. Thus, **Person F** posited, '*This is a very inclusive church, but this is actually unusual in comparison to many churches I have been in*'.

Overall, participants from the three urban churches recognised their churches as working towards removing barriers that could prevent people living with disabilities from participating in church. Some people whose disabilities were not of a physical nature stated that they appreciated efforts to increase physical access to churches; however, the physical changes made no difference to their experience of church because their barriers were each different. These participants wanted to emphasise that while physical access is important, many barriers to church for people living with disabilities are social and attitudinal—these are much harder to remove. It was agreed that inclusion for all people living with disabilities primarily

comes through establishing intentional ministry opportunities for people living with disabilities so they can be involved and connected in the church.

Impacts of Engaging

In the interviews conducted in the urban churches of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, it was apparent that both individuals and the broader church communities recognised intentional engagements with people living with disabilities positively impacted their parishes. First, as stated previously, the participants interviewed from the urban churches viewed themselves as actively contributing to the life of the church. In each of the churches, people expressed a belief that their respective church communities sought to encourage church members both with and without disabilities to recognise and utilise their God-given gifts in service to the Body of Christ. Amos Yong contended that while theologies of disability are certainly progressing, what is still often lacking in churches is the 'recognition of people with disabilities not just as passive recipients of the ministry of able-bodied

others, but as agents of ministry in their own right' [38]. In this sense, churches that actively seek to engage with people living with disabilities offer tangible demonstrations that such ministry is possible and indeed transformational for both individuals and church communities. Additionally, such engagement creates opportunities for people living with disabilities to demonstrate their capacity to be active agents of ministry and allows others to be served and ministered to by people living with disabilities.

In Romans 12, Paul again wrote of the range of gifts and abilities present among God's people. Here he stated that 'for just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others' (Romans 12:4–5). Paul exhorted the believers in Rome to recognise that all people have different skills and gifts and that all people, irrespective of what those gifts are, need to utilise those gifts and give them expression among the people of God. As demonstrated in the urban churches involved in the current research,

when such ministry occurred, church members were encouraged in their faith journeys, found new expressions of their faith and service to God and felt a stronger connection with their individual church community and the broader Church of Christ.

Implications of Engaging

As with Monica's research into engagement in rural churches, what is apparent from the three urban churches is that through actively engaging with people living with disabilities in their church communities, the churches are developing Christian communities through which all can belong with dignity through all life stages and experiences [39]. Each of the participants shared their own stories of engagement with their churches. Some of these stories addressed the challenges of giving birth to a child living with disabilities and having the church community rally around them in their period of adjustment. Others spoke of the challenges of age-related disabilities or the social effect of hearing or vision loss and the potential this had to interrupt an individual's experience of Christian

community. Again, participants spoke of their church's willingness to seek alternative means of communication, various lighting or technological adaptations or other changes to ensure such age-related disabilities were not barriers to inclusion and belonging. By supporting people living with disabilities in times of need, providing opportunities for their voices to be heard in church decision-making processes and the demonstration of the gifts of the spirit, these churches uphold and demonstrate the inherent value and dignity of all people as embodied expressions of the image of God.

Mary R. Sawyer described Christian community as 'a group of people coming together with intentionality to live the gospel values of inclusiveness, justice, and caring in order to create a transformed world' [39]. Sawyer stated that 'in ideal terms, Christian community rejects no one, reaches out to all, and values differences' [39]. Such community, she contended, is counter-cultural and 'disrupts the social order' of the world around us [39]. In a world in which disability is viewed as disruptive, preventable, draining of educational

and political budgets and wholly undesirable, the church has the opportunity to live out the expression of Christian community as envisioned by Sawyer, to promote and embrace 'inclusiveness, justice, and caring in order to create a transformed world' [39]. As demonstrated in the three urban churches, the expression of such Christian community not only works to build up all people within the church but also acts as an incredible witness to the outside world of what radical Christ-like love and acceptance look like in action.

Future Recommendations for Study and Ministry

This brief essay on the experiences of urban Anglican churches engaging with people living with disabilities relates the important stories of a small but significant group of people. However, such sociological research on the experiences of people living with disabilities in church communities, as presented in this essay and in the wider project authored by Monica Short, has rarely been undertaken. This leaves enormous scope for future research to be developed in this area. Possibilities for future study could include further research into the experiences of people living with disabilities in urban church settings either in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn or beyond. It would also be beneficial to consider more direct comparisons between the experiences of people living with disability in rural and urban communities. In light of this deficit of research in this field, I am currently undertaking similar research, in conjunction with the Social Issues Committee, on the experiences of people living with disabilities in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. It is hoped this research will further

contribute to the understanding of the value and contributions of people living with disabilities in church communities.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. This study has focused on churches that are already engaging with people living with disabilities. This research is incredibly valuable in offering examples of churches that effectively include others and the associated benefits to the community; however, yet to be addressed is the experiences of people living with disabilities who have not participated in churches where they were actively engaged. What could other churches do to ensure they are actively engaging with people living with disabilities? What actions, barriers or church policies have resulted in the exclusion and further marginalisation of people living with disabilities from church communities? Further research addressing specific areas of disability could also be of benefit. For example, what are the experiences of people living with mental health issues in church communities?

Another area of research that would be particularly valuable would be the ways in which

churches could actively seek to engage with people living with disabilities in the broader community. Given the statistics from the Australian Government's Shut out report on the experiences of people living with disabilities in Australian society [6], it is apparent that many people living with disabilities in our communities have little to no social networks and feel isolated and disconnected from the social and cultural world existing around them. In what ways could churches seek to reduce these experiences of exclusion for people living with disabilities who are currently outside of church communities? In Luke 14:15–24, Jesus told the parable of the great banquet with its call to 'go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame'. In a second call, the banquet host directed his servant to 'go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in'. The parable exhorted believers to actively engage in their world, in particular those marginalised members of society who would not historically have been recipients of banquet invitations. Rather than waiting for marginalised members of the community to come

to the church, the message of the parable is that it is the church's responsibility to actively seek the forgotten and overlooked members of society [40]. This leads to the question in what ways could, or do, churches build connections with people in society who are marginalised because of disability? Such research would offer tangible examples to other church communities on how such ministries could be done well and how they could become the places providing welcome and belonging.

Final Conclusions

This brief essay has described the experiences of three urban Anglican churches in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the way in which those churches are engaging with people living with disabilities. It was observed that through a range of ways, each of these churches deliberately ensured that the engagement of people living with disabilities was present in their church communities. Such engagement was achieved in each of the churches through the removal of both physical and attitudinal barriers that could act to exclude people living with disabilities from full participation. Through being encouraged to serve, and their contributions to ministry, participation in church activities and inclusion of their opinions and experiences in important decision-making processes, each of the participants were all encouraged in their faith. They felt loved and a valuable part of their Christian community. The benefit of this engagement, however, was not limited to the individuals living with disabilities. It fostered opportunities for people living with and

without disabilities to work alongside one another, serving one another with their spiritual gifts and demonstrating the radical love and inclusion of Jesus.

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Final Thoughts and Prayer

Bonhoeffer explained the Universal Church has the potential to engage with the forces of everyday life [154]. Both the case study into rural Anglican churches and the essay about urban Anglican church engagements with people living with disabilities indicated that the Anglican Church of Australia is at least partially but intentionally involved in the everyday life of people living with disabilities.

Additionally, people living with disabilities are actively building up and having a positive effect on their church and local communities. Observations from the two research projects about the participants' full integration into their local Anglican churches and their sense of belonging implies that all churches and organisations in Australia can be fully inclusive of people living with disabilities.

Through the two research projects, the participants explained how their churches helped build up their Christian identity and faith and shared love, hope, dignity and a mission with them and others. They presented their stories because they wished to celebrate their faith in Jesus and inspire

positive engagements for all people living with and without disabilities within society.

In closing, my prayer is that the above testimonies will support the Anglican churches' social inclusion and integration principles.

That the narratives will assist the church as it constantly strives to reflect the nature of God as revealed through the Bible.

That it will also encourage society to value people living with disabilities and their faith and provide people living with disabilities with the choice and/or support required for accessing and attending church.
Amen.

For seeing people living with and without disabilities fully integrated into all activities and decision-making within Anglican churches can allow everyone to realise they too can participate at church, belong and know God's and others' love.

Appendix A:
Permission, Statement, Consent Forms, Introductions and Participant Information Script

Recruitment/invitation email

My name is Monica Short and I am a lecturer with Charles Sturt University. Bush Church Aid and Louise/I are hoping to undertake a small research project about how rural/urban Anglican churches engage with people living with disabilities. We are particularly interested in what works well and why. I am hoping to run some semi-structured interviews with you and some key people associated with the church. I am hoping to give you a call in the next few days to answer any questions you may have. Is there a convenient time I may ring you, please?

God bless, Monica Short/Louise Gosbell

Introduction and Participant Information Scripts/sheets

The Anglican Church minister will have a copy of the following email:

My name is Monica Short and I am a lecturer with Charles Sturt University. Bush Church Aid Society and Louise/I are hoping to undertake a small research project about how rural/urban Anglican churches engage with their local community through activities or ministries provided with, by or for people living with disabilities. We are particularly interested in what works well and why. I am hoping to run some semi-structured interviews with you and some key people associated with the activities or ministries over the next little while. I am hoping to give you a call in the next few days to answer any questions you may have. Is there a convenient time I may ring you, please? God bless, Monica Short

Hello, my name is Monica Short/Louise Gosbell. Thank you for helping me. I am hoping to find out how this church, through this group, helps people living with disabilities. I am also hoping to find out how this church helps others in town through this

group. I am hoping to talk to you about the group and listen to what you think it does for everyone. I will be writing a paper about this group. I will not use your name in the paper. You do not have to talk to me. You can see what I write and say if I need to change it.

The Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the committee through:

The Executive Officer
Arts Faculty Human Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Boorooma Street
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678
Tel: 02 6933 4799
Email: artsfhec@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Consent Form

Rural/urban Anglican churches engaging with people living with disabilities.

Researcher: Monica Short, Charles Sturt University.
Partner organisation The Bush Church Aid Society.

Email: mshort@csu.edu.au
Telephone no: 0427 251 707

I, _____*(print name)*, give permission for information obtained by interviews about rural/urban Anglican church engagements with people living with disabilities to be used in this research project. I understand that the information will be disguised as necessary to ensure my and others confidentiality.

I have read or had read to me an information sheet (see above) about this project and I have had opportunities to ask questions about the project and have received satisfactory answers. I understand there are no anticipated risks to me as a consequence of participating in this research. I

understand that my participation is voluntary and will be kept confidential. There will be no penalty or disadvantage for me if I choose not to permit my material to be used. There is also no advantage to be gained by me through permitting my material to be used.

I understand that this project will be submitted for publication in an academic journal and/or a report for The Bush Church Aid Society and it may also be presented as a paper at conferences and referred to in other academic research and publications. I understand that no identifying information will be published. I understand that I am free to withdraw my information at any time prior to interview, during interview or up to publication without any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

I understand the Charles Sturt University Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee is the approving body for this research and that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

(coninued over)

The Executive Officer
Arts Faculty Human Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Boorooma Street
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678
Tel: 02 6933 4799
Email: artsfhec@csu.edu.au

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Would you like a copy of the paper/ journal article? Yes/no. If so, where can I email it to?

Email: _____

Consent For Use of Photos, Statements, Images, Poetry, Artwork, Newspaper Articles and Other Resources.

Researcher: Monica Short, Charles Sturt University. Partner organisation The Bush Church Aid Society, CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program and The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

I, _____(*print name*), give permission for resources about rural/urban Anglican church engagements with people living with disabilities to be used in this research project. I understand that the information will be disguised if necessary to ensure my and others confidentiality.

I have read or had read to me an information sheet (see above) about this project and I have had opportunities to ask questions about the project and have received satisfactory answers. I understand there are no anticipated risks to me as a consequence of providing resources for this research. I understand that my participation is

voluntary and will be kept confidential. There will be no penalty or disadvantage for me if I choose not to permit my material to be used. There is also no advantage to be gained by me through permitting my material to be used.

I understand that this project will be submitted for publication in an academic journal or as a report and it may also be presented as a paper at conferences and referred to in other academic research and publications. I understand that no identifying information will be published. I understand that I am free to withdraw my resources at any time prior to interview, during interview or up to publication without any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

I understand the Charles Sturt University Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee is the approving body for this research and that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

The Executive Officer
Arts Faculty Human Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Boorooma Street
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678
Tel: 02 6933 4799
Email: artsfhec@csu.edu.au

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Would you like a copy of the paper/ journal article? Yes/no. If so, where can I email it to?

Email: _____

Information Statement

Rural/urban Anglican Churches engaging with people living with a disability

Monica Short, Charles Sturt University social work lecturer and PhD student, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University
mshort@csu.edu.au, 0427251707

PhD supervisors:
Wendy Bowles wbowles@csu.edu.au;
Geoff Broughton gbroughton@csu.edu.au

Partner organisation and research host: Bush Church Aid, info@bushchurchaid.com.au

Hello, my name is Monica Short. Thank you for helping me/Louise Gosbell. Also thanks to your church for accommodating us today. I am here to collect stories and information for my studies and for a paper for The Bush Church Aid Society. The stories I am collecting, also known as case studies, are about rural/urban Anglican churches engaging with people living with disabilities. I am hoping to find out how this church, through this group, helps people living with disabilities. I am also hoping

to find out how this church helps others in town through this group. I am hoping to talk to you for about half an hour or so about the group and listen to what you think it does for everyone. You can talk to me with someone else present or by yourself. I will be taking notes about your stories. I will then collect everyone's stories together, think about them and write a paper about this group. I will not use your name in the paper.

You do not have to talk to me. You can stop talking to me at any time. There is no consequence if you do not talk to me. You can see what I write and say if I need to change it or not include something you said. This can happen at any time until the report is finished.

(coninued over)

The Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the committee through the:

The Executive Officer
Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee
Charles Sturt University
Boorooma Street, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678
Tel: 02 6933 4388
Email: artsfhec@csu.edu.au

Would you like to join in this project?

Many thanks

Monica Short

Appendix B:
Semi-structured Interview Themes

The semi-structured interviews closely followed relationism's five relational domains [155]. These five domains can be summarised as:
The contact or directness of communication
time—the frequency and length of the relationship
multiplexity—the context of meetings or church servicespower and parity—mutual respect and fairness within the relationship purpose—the shared goals and values and experience of those in the relationship [155, 156].

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Ethics was approved by Charles Sturt University Ethics Board on the 11 December 2015 and extended with variations on the 29 June 2016. The ethics protocol number is 100/2015/140. The Bush Church Aid Society also approved the research.

Monica Short Principal Researcher and Principal author

I am a member of the Anglican Church of Australia and a Christian. Disability is of both personal and professional importance to me. As a result, I integrated insider (emic) and external (etic) knowledge into this project. Personally, I am proud of my family members who have loved and nurtured me while navigating their impairments and/or chronic health conditions and I thank God for them.